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Teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards professional activity

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Abstract

The analysis of the teachers’ professional performance cannot ignore their perceptions, attitudes and job satisfactions. The present study has the following objectives: 1. to examine the relation between teachers’ perceptions of their profession, job satisfaction and mentality towards work; 2. to investigate whether are differences in the job satisfaction and mentality towards work depending on the level of teachers’ perception of their work. The results confirmed that the overall job satisfaction is positive correlated with different teachers’ perceptions of their professional activity and are differences in the levels of job satisfaction depending on the perceptions of teaching profession (work). Also, the differences in teachers’ mentality towards work (general and specific factors) depend on the perceptions of teaching profession. The implications of the findings have been discussed.

Keywords: Teaching profession, teachers’ perceptions, attitudes towards work, job satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Teaching profession is not a new area of research and different approaches have been used in order to explain it. Teaching profession is based on vocational and personal skills and competencies, involves professional and ethical standards and models, and entails a continuous process of professional development. In different countries, the recent implemented changes and reforms in educational field require teachers to demonstrate ongoing competences in their roles and adapt to new job requirements. Teachers are often pressed to do more work with fewer resources and are required to obtain high outcomes in their professional activities. Extensive quantitative and qualitative research was based on investigation of teachers’ beliefs and perceptions of their professional activity, job satisfaction, and motivation. Teachers make decisions in teaching activity based on their experiences, perceptions, values and beliefs about their roles, activities, and responsibilities in schools. Research has indicated that positive teachers’ attitudes and perceptions are fundamental for effective teaching, and teachers’ beliefs, perceptions and attitudes affect their practice and influence the students’ performance (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). High teachers’ attitudes towards teaching profession have effects on their classroom performance and teaching practice, and are correlated with the burnout level (Ispir, 2010). In order to understand teachers’ attitudes, job satisfaction was used to assess teachers’ attitude towards work (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009). Teachers’ job satisfaction has been recognized as extremely important for implementing any type of education reform, for involving the teacher in life-long learning,
and for the quality of the teaching-learning process. As a process by which people attach meaning to experience (Eggen & Kauchak, 2001), the perception of teaching profession helps teachers’ to gain meanings and to understand the different aspects, experiences, roles, responsibilities and practices from their professional activity. Beginning teachers start their careers with more positive views of their work and work environment that most other professions. However, after only 8 months of service, when they confronted with the reality of teaching, their positive work perceptions significant declined associated with increasing levels of burnout. Teachers reported that they were required to exert more effort than their more experienced colleagues and this effort required to undertake teaching was greater than the rewards that resulted from being a teacher. This fact suggests a declining overall perception of teaching career during the first 8 months of professional practice (Goddard & O'Brien, 2003; Meerah et al., 2010). The teacher psychological experiences and their perceptions of their workplace can be sources of stress that have the potential to undermine teacher effectiveness (Ransford et al., 2009). Yates (2004) investigated the primary and secondary teachers’ perceptions of professional learning activities starting from the principles of the effective teacher professional development.

2. Purposes of Study

This study is a part of a large on-going investigation concerning teachers’ job motivation and attitudes, and the relationships with job satisfaction and performance. The following objectives were addressed: 1. to examine the relationships between teachers’ perceptions of their profession, job satisfaction and mentality towards work; 2. to investigate whether are differences in the job satisfaction and mentality towards work depending on the level of teachers’ perception of their profession and work. The hypotheses of the present study are:

H1: We assume that is a significant relationship between job satisfaction and the perceptions of teaching profession/work.

H2: We presume that are differences in the levels of overall job satisfaction depending on the perceptions of teaching profession/work.

H3: We state that are differences in teachers’ mentality towards work depending on the perceptions of teaching profession.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The sample consisted of 201 participants, randomly selected, Romanian teachers in primary, secondary and high schools, with ages from 22 to 65 years (mean=40.65, s.d.=10.43) and a length of service in educational system from 1 to 46 years (mean=16.35, s.d.=10.64). Were 161 female (80.1%) and 40 male (19.9%). The distribution of the sample by seniority criterion is: 33 (16.4%) teachers have a seniority between 1 to 5 years, 34 teachers from 6 to 10 years (16.9%), 71 teachers between 11 to 20 years (68.7%), and 63 teachers have a seniority above 21 years (31.3%). 149 (74.1%) teachers work in urban and 52 (25.9%) in rural environment. 9 (4.5%) teachers have pre-bachelors degree, 112 have bachelor’s degree (55.7%), 79 (39.3%) have master’s degree, and 1 (0.5%) of them have PhD. 109 (54.2%) are teachers in high schools, 63 (31.3%) in secondary schools and 29 (14.4%) in primary schools. The sample’s distribution by the criterion of teaching degrees is: 18 (9%) are beginner teachers, 42 (20.9%) tenured teachers, 54 (26.9%) second degree graduated, 87 (43.3%) first degree graduated. 164 (81.6%) are full teachers and 37 (18.4%) are substitute teachers. 27 teachers (13.4%) have leading positions and responsibilities (21 managers, 6 school inspectors). All participants are teachers in public schools and are qualified for the teaching job.

3.2. Procedure

Were applied three instruments. The first standardized instrument was SP Questionnaire (Constantin, 2004) which assesses the job satisfaction by a general factor and three secondary factors (satisfaction towards pay and
promotion, leadership and interpersonal relations, work organizing and communication). The instrument has a good reliability: the overall Alpha Crombach is 0.87. In this study was taken into consideration only the level of overall job satisfaction. The second instrument was MM Questionnaire (Constantin, 2004) which aims at identifying the mentality towards work as a general dominant attitude (general score) and two secondary factors: work is viewed as “achievement and self-determination” (positive attitude about work which is considered as an important condition for personal life development, a self-fulfillment factor) and work is viewed as “obligation and avoidance” (negative attitude towards work). The Alpha Crombach coefficients are 0.80 (overall), 0.78 and 0.70 (for secondary factors). In order to measure the teachers’ perception of their work was used a scale that relied on self-reporting from the participants. The scale consists of 16 items divided in three subscales regarding the different perspectives of perception towards teaching profession. The score for each subscale was computed as the mean score of the items for each subscale. High scores mean a positive perception of teaching profession and low scores a negative perception. The subscales were: subscale 1. perception of the moral responsibility and social importance of the teaching profession (6 items, examples: Teaching profession is valorized/appreciated by the society; Teaching profession is invested with social prestige; Teaching profession supposes a level of moral responsibility). The subscale’s Alpha Crombach coefficient is 0.781. Subscale 2: perception of quality and efficiency of work in teaching profession (5 items, examples: Teaching profession requires constantly a high standard of work’s quality). The Alpha Crombach is 0.837. Subscale 3: perception of the motivating potential of the teaching profession (5 items, examples: Teaching profession contributes to my continuous professional development; Teaching profession provides opportunities of personal development). Because have been taken into consideration only internal motivations, this subscale included only items regarding the development and satisfaction of the internal needs in teaching profession (achievement, personal growth, professional self-development and recognition). The subscale’s Alpha Crombach coefficient is 0.774. The participants indicated their responses on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never true for me) to 7 (always true for me), the extent to which they are agreed with the statements. The prior instructions for the questionnaire were applied regarding their teaching profession and work.

4. Results

Hypothesis 1: The descriptive statistics of the variables are: job satisfaction (m=4.52, s.d.=0.68), perception of the responsibility-importance of teaching profession (m=5.27, s.d.=1.20), perception of work’s quality (m=5.70, s.d.=1.15), perception of teaching profession’s motivating potential (m=4.42, s.d.=1.01). In order to show the correlations between variables were calculated Pearson coefficients (1-tailed). The statistical analysis showed that overall job satisfaction significantly correlated with the subscales of teachers’ perception scale: moral responsibility and social importance of the teaching profession (r=0.39, p=0.00), quality and efficiency of work in teaching profession (r=0.34, p=0.00), and motivating potential of teaching profession (r=0.49, p=0.00). Also, were obtained high positive significant correlation between factors of teachers’ perceptions: moral responsibility-social importance of teaching profession and quality-efficiency of work (r=0.70, p=0.00), moral responsibility-social importance and teaching profession’s motivating potential (r=0.67, p=0.00), work quality in teaching profession and its motivating potential (r=0.71, p=0.00).

Hypothesis 2: Depending on the mean scores of the three subscales, participants were divided in two groups (low scores - group1 and high scores – group2) for each factor. Were tested the differences between the groups’ means. Dependent variable was overall job satisfaction. Effect size was tested using r-squared coefficient of determination. The results showed that: a) negative/ low and positive/high perception of teaching profession’s moral responsibility and social importance (N1=88, m1=4.25; N2=113, m2=4.73); t=- 5.25, p< 0.001 (2-tailed); r-squared=0.12; b) negative/ low and positive/high perception of work’s quality and efficiency in teaching profession (N1=80, m1=4.24; N2=121, m2=4.70); t=-4.87, p<0.001 (2-tailed); r-squared =0.11; c) negative/ low and positive/ high perception of teaching profession’s motivating potential (N1=89, m1=4.22; N2=112, m2=4.76); t=− 6.01, p<0.001 (2-tailed); r-squared =0.15.

Hypothesis 3: The relationships between teacher’s perceptions of their profession, assessed by three specific factors, and teachers’ mentality towards work, assessed by a general and two specific factors, was tested by one-way
MANOVA procedure. Dependent variables were general mentality towards work and the secondary factors: positive and negative attitudes towards work. The data were prior analyzed to verify the conditions for MANOVA’s application. The multivariate tests indicated the following:

- the teachers’ perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance has a significant relation with teachers’ mentality towards work (Box’s M test=17.46, F(6, 2.44)=2.86, p=0.009>0.001, Wilks’ Lambda=0.016, F=4.60, p=0.000, partial eta squared=0.87, Hotelling’s trace=63.12, F=2.06, p=0.000, partial eta squared=0.96, observed power=1);
- teachers’ perception of their work’s quality and efficiency has a significant relation with teachers’ mentality towards work, assessed by a combination between general and secondary attitudes towards work (Box’s M=11.76, F=1.92, p=0.07, Wilks’ Lambda=0.014, F=4.84, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.88, observed power=1);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s motivating potential has a significant relation with teachers’ mentality towards work, assessed by a combination between general and secondary attitudes towards work (Box’s M=13.77, F=2.25, p=0.03, Wilks’ Lambda=0.015, F=4.62, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.87, Hotelling’s trace=63.31, F=2.06, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.97, observed power=1). In all three cases the size effect is high. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects indicated the following:

- teachers’ perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance significantly influences their general mentality towards work (Levene p=0.05, F=2.97, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.96);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance significantly influences their positive attitude towards work viewed as personal “achievement” (F=5.72, p=0.000, partial eta squared=0.98);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance significantly influences their negative attitude towards work viewed as “obligation” (F=645.09, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.86);
- teachers’ perception of their work’s quality significantly influences their general mentality towards work (Levene p >0.05, F=3.02, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.96);
- teachers’ perception of their professional work’s quality significantly influences their positive attitude towards work (Levene p >0.05, F=6.28, p=0.000, partial eta squared=0.98);
- teachers’ perception of their work’s quality significantly influences their negative attitude towards work (Levene p <0.05, F=644.90, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.86);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s motivating potential significantly influences their general mentality towards work (Levene p=0.05, F=2.96, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.96);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s motivating potential significantly influences their positive attitude towards work (Levene p >0.05, F=5.76, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.98);
- teachers’ perception of their profession’s motivating potential significantly influences their negative attitude towards work (Levene p< 0.01, F=646.14, p=0.000, partial eta squared= 0.86). In all cases the size effect is strong and observed power=1. Contrasts results indicated that although are differences in general attitude towards work between teachers with a positive perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance and teachers with a negative perception, but these differences are no significantly (t=0.08, p=0.05). The differences in positive attitude towards work between teachers with a high perception of their profession’s responsibility and social importance and teachers with a low perception are no significantly (t=0.11, p>0.05), such as the differences in the level of negative attitude towards work between teachers with a high perception of their professional responsibility and teachers with a low perception (t=0.06, p>0.05), and differences in general attitude towards work between teachers with a positive perception of their professional work’s quality and teachers with a negative perception (t=0.23, p>0.05). Are significant differences in positive attitude towards work between teachers with a high perception of their professional work’s quality and teachers with a low perception (t=0.48, p<0.05). So, teachers with a high perception of their professional work’s quality and efficiency have a positive attitude towards their work too, which is viewed as an “achievement and self-determination” factor, than teachers with a low level of perception concerning their professional work’s quality. Also, are no significant differences in: negative attitude towards work between teachers with a positive perception of their professional work’s quality and teachers with a negative perception (t=0.03, p>0.05); general attitude towards work between teachers with a positive perception of their profession’s motivating potential and teachers with a negative perception (t=0.02, p>0.05); positive attitude towards
work between teachers with a positive perception of their profession’s motivating potential and teachers with a negative perception ($t=0.17$, $p>0.05$); negative attitude towards work between teachers with a positive perception of their profession’s motivating potential and teachers with a negative perception ($t=-0.12$, $p>0.05$).

5. Discussions and conclusions

First, this study tried to answer to the following question: if are relations between different attitudes and perceptions of their work and professional activities and the level of job satisfaction in teachers. The results confirmed that the overall job satisfaction is higher when the teachers’ perception of their professional activity is higher. Therefore, teachers which think that teaching profession is more based on moral responsibility and social importance, work quality and efficiency, and has a motivating potential for them, have higher levels of job satisfaction too, and conversely. Second, were demonstrated that these groups are differences means that teachers with high (positive) perceptions of teaching profession’s significantly differ in their job satisfaction by comparison with teachers low (negative) perceptions of teaching profession’s in all its aspects: moral responsibility and social importance of teaching profession, work’s quality and efficiency, and teaching profession’s motivating potential. Third, the basic question was if the mentality towards work and its secondary components is in relation with perceptions of their profession in teachers. The outcomes showed that different teachers’ perceptions of their profession have effects on the combination of general mentality towards work and its secondary components. So, teachers’ perception of their professional responsibility influences the interaction between their general mentality, positive and negative attitudes towards work. Similarly, the same relations are between teachers’ perception of their quality work and perception of the motivating potential of the teaching profession and the interaction between their general mentality, positive and negative attitudes towards work. Multiple comparisons revealed significant differences only for the perception of professional work’s quality and efficiency. So, teachers with a high perception of their professional work’s quality have a positive attitude towards their work too, which is viewed as an “achievement and self-determination” factor, than teachers with a low level of perception concerning their professional work’s quality.

One of the primary limitations of this study is that the research was entirely based on self-report measures. Another limitation is that this study is more analytical and descriptive, but it didn’t focus on the causes which determine or influence the development of the perceptions of teaching profession and the attitudes towards work in teachers. However, the findings of this research could have implications both for understanding teachers’ perceptions and attitudes towards the different aspects, roles, tasks and components of their profession and for supporting teachers to develop positive perceptions and attitudes of their teaching profession. This fact could be a starting point to develop and implement of strategic actions focused on how teachers can be more engaged and retained in their job, and can be implied to participate to their continuous professional development to become more efficient, competent and professional teachers.

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