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SUPPORTING TEACHER WELL-BEING THROUGH SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Abstract

Teacher well-being is crucial because chronic stress affects teacher retention, instructional quality, and school functioning. While school leadership is considered an important organizational resource, it remains unclear whether it directly improves well-being or buffers everyday work stressors. Drawing on the Job Demands–Resources model and Self-Determination Theory, this study examined how leadership fairness, people-orientation, and power-sharing relate to teachers' job satisfaction, burnout, and self-efficacy. Survey data from 1,179 Slovenian teachers showed that stressors predicted poorer outcomes, while leadership behaviors explained additional variance but did not significantly buffer the effects of job demands.

Keywords: *Teacher well-being, school leadership, job satisfaction, burnout, self-efficacy.*

1. Introduction

Teacher well-being is a major concern in educational psychology because chronic occupational stress negatively affects teacher retention, instructional quality, and school functioning (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Teachers often face multiple job demands, including heavy workloads, time pressure, and challenging classroom conditions such as student misbehavior and low student motivation. According to the Job Demands–Resources (JD–R) model, these demands can lead to strain and burnout when adequate resources are lacking (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). School leadership represents a key organizational resource that may support teacher well-being. Research shows that effective leadership contributes to positive school climates, collaboration, and improved teacher outcomes (Leithwood et al., 2008). Leadership behaviors characterized by fairness, relational support, and shared decision-making have been linked to higher job satisfaction and lower burnout among teachers (Kalshoven et al., 2011). Self-Determination Theory further highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in psychological functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Leadership practices such as power-sharing and people-oriented leadership may support these needs, strengthening teachers' motivation and professional self-efficacy. An unresolved question is whether leadership only contributes directly to teacher well-being or also buffers the effects of work stressors. Within the JD–R framework, leadership may function as a compensatory resource with direct effects or as a buffering resource moderating job demands. This study examines how perceived fairness, people-oriented leadership, and power-sharing relate to teacher job satisfaction, burnout, and self-efficacy in Slovenia while accounting for key work stressors.

1.1. Objectives

The study pursued two objectives. First, it examined associations between leadership behaviors (fairness, people-oriented leadership, and power-sharing) and teacher well-being indicators (job satisfaction, burnout, and self-efficacy). Second, it investigated whether leadership behaviors explain additional variance in these outcomes after controlling for common stressors, including time pressure, student misbehavior, and low student motivation. Based on the JD–R model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and prior research on school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2008), we hypothesized that stressors would predict lower job satisfaction and self-efficacy and higher burnout; that leadership behaviors would be positively related to well-being; and that leadership would explain incremental variance beyond stressors.

2. Methodology

Participants. The study used cross-sectional survey data from 1,179 Slovenian teachers: 73% from elementary schools, 26% from upper secondary schools, and 1% from other educational institutions.

Measures. The questionnaire assessed work stressors, leadership perceptions, and teacher well-being outcomes (job satisfaction, burnout, and self-efficacy). Three common stressors were measured (time pressure, student misbehavior, and low student motivation) identified as key sources of teacher strain (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Leadership was assessed through perceived fairness, people-oriented

leadership, and power-sharing, reflecting ethical and participatory leadership perspectives (Kalshoven et al., 2011).

Data Analysis. Linear and hierarchical regression analyses were conducted. First, regression models examined associations between leadership behaviors and teacher outcomes. Second, hierarchical models tested whether leadership explained additional variance after controlling for stressors. Step 1 included stressors, whereas Step 2 added leadership variables.

3. Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations. Teachers reported relatively high levels of job satisfaction (M = 4.29, SD = 0.80) and moderate levels of burnout (M = 2.39, SD = 0.86). Leadership behaviors were positively associated with teacher well-being: fairness, people-oriented leadership, and power-sharing correlated positively with job satisfaction and self-efficacy and negatively with burnout. In contrast, work stressors (time pressure, student misbehavior, and low student motivation) were positively related to burnout and negatively related to job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	N	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	1182	4.13	0.85	-							
2	1182	3.26	0.42	.34**	-						
3	1181	3.38	0.94	.54**	.35**	-					
4	1184	4.59	0.99	-.24**	-.02	-.15**	-				
5	1184	3.70	1.29	-.17**	-.04	-.06	.39**	-			
6	1184	3.32	1.18	-.23**	-.02	-.08**	.27**	.51**	-		
7	1180	4.29	0.80	.44**	.24**	.38**	-.36**	-.30**	-.32**	-	
8	1181	2.39	0.86	-.26**	-.05	-.13**	.45**	.41**	.42**	-.47**	-
9	1184	3.11	0.38	.16**	.08**	.15**	-.01	-.20**	-.29**	.29**	-.27**

Note: N = number of participants; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; Predictors: 1 – Fairness, 2 – Power-sharing, 3 – People orientation; Stressors: 4 – Time pressure, 5 – Student misbehavior, 6 – Low student motivation; Outcomes: 7 – Job satisfaction, 8 – Burnout, 9 – Self-efficacy; The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated as a measure of correlation; **p < .01; *p < .05.

Leadership and Teacher Self-Efficacy. Regression analysis showed that leadership variables explained a small but significant proportion of variance in self-efficacy (R^2 = .033, $F(3,1177)$ = 13.31, $p < .001$). Fairness (β = .11, p = .001) and people-oriented leadership (β = .09, p = .011) were positively associated with self-efficacy, whereas power-sharing was not significant.

Leadership and Burnout. Leadership variables explained 6.8% of the variance in burnout (R^2 = .068, $p < .001$). Fairness showed a significant negative association with burnout ($\beta = -.27$, $p < .001$), while other leadership variables were not significant.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of job satisfaction and burnout as predicted by stressors and leadership factors.

	Job satisfaction						Burnout					
Variable	Model 1			Model 2			Model 1			Model 2		
	B	β	SE_B	B	β	SE_B	B	β	SE_B	B	β	SE_B
Constant	5.941		.105	3.698		.195	.118		.105	.652		.212
1	-.216**	-.268**	.023	-.163**	-.202**	.021	.274**	.314**	.023	.255**	.293**	.023
2	-.055**	-.090**	.020	-.054**	-.087**	.018	.105**	.158**	.020	.104**	.156**	.020
3	-.138**	-.204**	.021	-.108**	-.159**	.019	.189**	.257**	.021	.176**	.240**	.021
4				.195**	.208**	.028				-.107**	-.106**	.030
5				.167**	.087**	.050				.021	.010	.054
6				.161**	.190**	.025				-.008**	-.009**	.027
R^2	.19			.33			.31			.32		
ΔR^2				.14						.01		

Note. Stressors: 1 – Time pressure, 2 – Student misbehavior, 3 – Low student motivation; Leadership factors: 4 – Fairness, 5 – Power-sharing, 6 – People orientation; Both regression models are statistically significant. The assumption of multicollinearity was tested on all data sets and was not violated (the VIFs were lower than 10 and varied between 1.19 and 1.57). Statistically significant coefficients are marked with ** (p < .01) or * (p < .05).

Leadership and Job Satisfaction. Leadership variables explained a substantial proportion of variance in job satisfaction (R^2 = .225, $p < .001$). Fairness (β = .32), people-oriented leadership (β = .19), and power-sharing (β = .06) were all positively associated with job satisfaction.

Hierarchical Regression Analyses. When work stressors were entered first, they explained a considerable proportion of variance in teacher outcomes. For job satisfaction, stressors explained 18.9% of the variance, while adding leadership variables increased explained variance to 33.4% ($\Delta R^2 = .145$, $p < .001$). All leadership variables remained significant predictors in the final model. For burnout, stressors explained 31.4% of the variance. Adding leadership variables increased explained variance slightly to 32.4% ($\Delta R^2 = .011$). In this model, only fairness remained a significant predictor ($\beta = -.11$, $p < .001$). A hierarchical regression model was not conducted for teacher self-efficacy because the stressor variables showed only weak or non-significant correlations with self-efficacy (see Table 1), suggesting limited potential for meaningful incremental effects. Overall, work stressors were strong predictors of teacher well-being, while leadership behaviors explained additional variance, particularly for job satisfaction.

4. Discussion

This study examined the role of school leadership in teacher well-being using the JD–R model and Self-Determination Theory. Work stressors strongly predicted teacher outcomes: time pressure, student misbehavior, and low student motivation were associated with lower job satisfaction and higher burnout, consistent with prior research on classroom-related stressors (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Leadership behaviors were significantly linked to teacher well-being. Perceived fairness was the most consistent predictor, positively related to job satisfaction and self-efficacy and negatively to burnout, aligning with findings on ethical leadership in educational settings (Kalshoven et al., 2011). People-oriented leadership was positively associated with job satisfaction and self-efficacy, indicating that supportive leader–teacher relationships foster positive professional experiences. Power-sharing had a weaker but significant link with job satisfaction, suggesting that participation in decision-making may enhance autonomy. Leadership explained additional variance in teacher outcomes beyond stressors, although its effect on burnout and self-efficacy was modest. Overall, leadership acted primarily as a compensatory resource rather than a buffering mechanism, improving well-being without fully mitigating the impact of job demands. These findings highlight the importance of leadership development emphasizing fairness, respect, and teacher involvement to promote healthier and more supportive school environments.

5. Conclusion

This study examined how school leadership relates to teacher well-being in a large sample of Slovenian teachers. Work stressors such as time pressure and challenging student behavior were strong predictors of teacher burnout and reduced job satisfaction. Leadership behaviors, particularly perceived fairness, were significantly associated with teacher well-being and explained additional variance in outcomes beyond work stressors. However, leadership did not appear to strongly buffer the effects of job demands. Overall, the findings suggest that school leadership functions primarily as a supportive organizational resource that enhances teacher well-being rather than eliminating the impact of workplace stressors. Strengthening leadership practices may therefore represent an important strategy for promoting sustainable and supportive working conditions for teachers.

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