

A Critique of Principal Self-Efficacy

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Due to the critical importance of the principal role in school success, Federici and Skaalvik (2015) believe attending to the relationship between principals' sense of efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit warrants investigation. According to these researchers, Norwegian principals have experienced increased pressure and stress due to on-going changes, such as a move towards decentralized decision-making expectations and more scrutiny from ministry officials (p. 296). The authors further highlight previous research that indicates how one's level of self-efficacy informs performance and the ability to persist through challenges; they argue that this construct would relate to principals' ability to deal with role volume and complexity. They assert their position for their quantitative research by noting that previous studies have not yet explored the connection between these variables in the same study. Moreover, they hypothesize that principal self-efficacy "will be positively related to job satisfaction and negatively related to burnout and motivation to quit" (p. 298). Based on personal experience as a vice principal, and from reading some of the research on self-efficacy, their hypothesis matches my understanding and predictions.

The following paper is a critique of this study to continue to better understand the elements of quality research designs. However, the particular emphasis in this critique will be on the quantitative characteristics, namely, clarification of the exogenous variable, principal self-efficacy, and the endogenous variables, burnout, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit, involved. Further, attention will be placed on the instruments used, the data collection process, and any related validity issues, although from a novice, albeit budding, researcher perspective. I will share some thoughts and reactions to the study in light of my commitment to better understand quality research and interest in principal effectiveness.

Principal Self-efficacy

In summary of the research reviewed, this study refers to self-efficacy as “the individuals belief about what he or she can achieve in a given context” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 297). Individuals who are high in self-efficacy are able to manage challenges by perceiving that they indeed have the ability to be resilient and persist through the difficulties they encounter. In contrast, those with low levels of self-efficacy tend to become doubtful about their abilities and can become threatened by the challenges (p. 297). More precisely related to principals, research on self-efficacy in leadership roles indicates how critical this characteristic is in leadership success, particularly due to the complexity of the environments they work in. Not surprising, research has shown that principals with higher levels of self-efficacy are more engaged and satisfied in their work, with lower levels of burnout (p. 298).

Burnout

Since the 1970s burnout has been noted in the research, although different definitions have evolved since then. Federici and Skaalvik (2015) describe the work of Maslach who they share defines burnout as “a psychological syndrome that involves a prolonged response to stressors in the workplace” (p. 298) and is most often shown as emotional or physical exhaustion. The article describes the literature on burnout as it connects to the other variables in this study, such as self-efficacy and job satisfaction

Job Satisfaction

Differing ways job satisfaction is understood are described but Federici and Skaalvik (2015) emphasize researcher Locke, who defines job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job.” Studies do reveal that job satisfaction is related to burnout and self-efficacy (p. 300).

Motivation to Quit

Although there may be many reasons for individuals to quit their job, studies have indicated a relationship between burnout and leaving the role. Of particular interest, it has been shown that self-efficacy may play a role in preventing one to quit. However, the authors also make note of the fact that many people may experience job dissatisfaction and never quit (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 301). This illuminates the question for me regarding whether principals who are dissatisfied with their work and do not quit are indeed effective in leading schools.

Data Collection

This section of the article allowed me to further reflect on the reading in O'Leary and Hunt (2016) that outlines key considerations for creating effective survey data, and how surveys were used in this quantitative study. Being able to access a large number of participants for confidential responses generated the empirical data for this study, which are key criteria for this kind of research. In addition, ensuring that surveys are created with careful planning is key for study validity. I believe that the survey was thoughtfully constructed, although there were a mix of different scales used to reflect each variable being studied; this predictably contributed to the careful forethought required for the study.

Principals from 2,900 private and public schools in Norway were invited to participate. Sixty-three percent of principals participated with a total of 1,818 responding to the request for involvement. Participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire that was sent to each principals' personal email. The article describes more specific details of the participant make-up of those involved, such as 47.1 % were males and 52.9 were females (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015 p. 302). Diverse participants appear to comprise the group.

Instruments Used

For each endogenous variable, a specific instrument was chosen for measurement and given in Norwegian. The following outlines more specific details for each instrument used, as it is important to understand how a multi-dependent variable quantitative study is conducted

The authors make note of and cast doubt on some instruments for assessing principal self-efficacy regarding whether these scales would indeed capture the specific nature of principal work. As a result, Federici and Skaalvik rely on their co-developed Norwegian Principal Self-Efficacy Scale (NPSES), which is comprised of 22 items on eight dimensions with the intention to cover the various areas of a principal's work. Respondents provided a rating on a scale from 1 to 7 from "Not certain at all," to "Absolutely certain" (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015 p. 302).

Reviewing the NPSES, I noted key areas included that do reflect the leadership role, such as instructional leadership, teacher support, and parent relations (p. 317). However, when I compare this scale with some of the duties that British Columbian principals are responsible for, I conclude that the NPSES is a bare minimum of the dynamic nature of principal responsibilities. Further items or dimensions might include assessment practices, consensus building, school visioning, inclusive education, and the Indigenous Principles of Learning embedded in school culture. Yet, the transferability of this scale in international studies appears to have a place when I consider these scales as reflecting a minimum of dimensions one would expect in most western countries. Federici and Skaalvik (2015) make note of the NPSES not yet being used in different cultures and believe that it could apply to all principals. It is possible that the NPSES could be used in different cultures with some modifications.

However, considering the instrument further, I found some of the wording of the items to be questionable, such as "get the municipal authority to change their opinion if I disagree," under

the dimension “Relation to municipal authority” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 317). The wording seems adversarial in nature and does not lend itself to co-construction of decision-making that would reflect a twenty-first century leadership approach necessary for a school principal.

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to determine burnout with some adjustments made to reflect principals’ work since it was previously used for Norwegian teachers. Interestingly, this instrument was developed in 1996 and as a result, I am inferring it has stood the reliability test time. Participants responded on a 7-point scale to statements referring to fatigue levels, insensitivity feelings towards employees, and positive contribution experiences (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 303).

A 5-point scale was created to measure job satisfaction, focusing on general feelings and perspectives to their work. Statements about job satisfaction provided the opportunity for participants to indicate their feelings about being inspired by their work, enjoying being a principal, and feeling positive about heading to work each day, for example (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015,). This kind of scale did not appear to be overly complex to create and may be applicable to all kinds of employment.

To determine motivation to quit, participants were invited to respond to only two statements about a desire to change their profession and whether they might like to do something else, other than school administration. A 6-point scale was used (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 303).

Data Analysis and Results

At this point in the article I had difficulty following what was meant by the many terms used to describe the analysis, namely a “confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural

equation modeling (SEM)” (Federici & Skaalvik, 2015, p. 303). My novice understanding is that the researchers first determined through the CFA that what was intended to be measured was indeed measured, prior to formally engaging in the evaluation of the relationships between the variables. An “empirical covariance matrix” (p. 304) made up the data which reflects this study involving more than one dependent variable, and an intention to seek relationships among them. Specific software was used for analysis which did not include Confidence Interval and Standard Deviation calculations, so these needed to be conducted independently of the software.

In the results section, the findings of this study are discussed in detail. I notice two figures that depict two models used for analysis and the relationship between the variables in connection to the specific dimensions of self-efficacy. Six tables are also included to show the calculations of regression weights and standardized results, although I am unsure of what these mean. Yet, I am pleased with myself that I have a beginning understanding of these statistical concepts due to quantitative coursework with Kansas University professor Saatcioglu. My hunch is that with some one to one coaching, with the article as reference, my understanding would increase significantly, due to recognizing some of the terms but not able to recall their deeper meanings at this time.

In conclusion, Federici and Skaalvik (2015) highlight that their study “indicates the importance of principals’ self-efficacy for both burnout and job satisfaction and shows how these concepts relate to principals’ motivation to quit the job” (p. 312). The work of Norwegian principals is challenging due to the changing expectations of the curriculum and they argue that self-efficacy promotes principals’ ability to be effective in light of these shifting characteristics (p. 313). They suggest that new principals be offered mentoring to support their self-efficacy development.

Federici and Skaalvik (2015) mention limitations to the study in light of the reliance on self-reporting; it is not known whether the responses are accurate, but this is not atypical for a quantitative research study that relies on survey results. They also suggest that future research explore more causal relationships among the variables through an exploration longitudinal studies (p. 313).

With the intention of exploring ways to support principals and vice-principals in their work for my doctoral research, I valued reading this quantitative research article to recognize the importance of self-efficacy in relation to burnout, job satisfaction, and motivation to leave. I am also more informed about the possible signs of burnout and job satisfaction that can contribute to my own understanding of possible ways I can influence supports for principals and advocate for mentorship possibilities.

References

- Federici, R.A., & Skaalvik, E.M. (2015). Principal self-efficacy: Relations with burnout, job satisfaction and motivation to quit. *Social psychology in education* 15, 295-320.

Research Literacy for Administrators in Higher Education**Rubric: Journal Article Critique #2****Citation** (1 point) _____

- Uses correct APA citation format

Content (1-3 points) _____

- Describes the data used in the study, including dependent and independent variables
- Describes the data collection process used
- Discusses validity issues related to the data collected

Clarity (1 point) _____

- Thoughtful, well-expressed paper that is clearly organized and includes a map and introduction
- Evidence of careful proofreading/editing throughout

Total: _____ / 5

pts.