

Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies and Their Role in Occupational Well-Being

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Abstract

The teaching profession is characterised by high levels of stress and numerous emotional challenges, especially in the early stages of a career. Previous research suggests that teachers' social and emotional competencies (SEC) are related to their occupational well-being as they influence the way they cope with everyday emotional challenges at work. This points to the role of SEC as potential psychological resources that can mitigate negative outcomes such as burnout and leaving the profession among teachers in the early stages of their career. However, research in this area is still scarce and it is unclear how certain SEC are related to different aspects of occupational well-being and commitment to the teaching profession. The aim of this paper is to review conceptual frameworks of SEC and existing research in the field, discuss the role they play in education and compare them with related constructs in the domain of individual differences. Furthermore, it will provide an overview of research on teachers' occupational well-being and examine the relevance of teachers' SEC for outcomes such as burnout, work engagement, and job satisfaction. The paper will conclude by examining methodological aspects of SEC assessment and review challenges and directions for future research.

Keywords: teachers, social and emotional competencies, burnout, job satisfaction

Introduction

As schools are increasingly recognised as places where not only academic knowledge and skills but also "life skills" are acquired, the development of social

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and emotional competencies (SEC) within the school context has recently become an important topic in educational research and practice. Indeed, programmes aimed at developing SEC in students have been found to play an important role in increasing academic performance, grade point average, and prosocial behaviour, while reducing aggressive and risk behaviour (Corcoran et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2017). To date, research on the importance of SEC has mainly focused on student outcomes, while less is known about the role of SEC in teacher-related outcomes. However, as the field of social and emotional learning (SEL) continues to evolve and recognise the role of teachers' SEC in the process of developing students' SEC and improving the overall school climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), as well as their role in important outcomes such as occupational well-being (Oberle et al., 2020; Schonert-Reichl, 2019), a growing body of research has been focusing on teachers' SEC, their assessment and development.

Despite the fact that the number of studies concerning teachers' SEC continues to grow, much remains unknown about their role in certain aspects of occupational well-being such as burnout, job satisfaction and persistence in the teaching profession. This is largely because both teachers' SEC and their occupational well-being are multidimensional constructs (Hascher & Waber, 2021), which has important consequences for their operationalization and measurement. While there appears to be consensus regarding the benefits of SEC for various outcomes, there is also wide variation in the number and nature of skills included in different models and frameworks of SEC (Abrahams et al., 2019; Primi et al., 2016; Soto et al., 2022). The aim of this paper is to review conceptual frameworks of SEC and existing research in the field, discuss the role they play in education, and compare them with related constructs in the domain of individual differences. We will then turn to the concept of teachers' occupational well-being and examine the relevance of teachers' SEC for outcomes such as burnout, work engagement, and job satisfaction. We will conclude by examining methodological aspects of SEC assessment and review challenges and directions for future research.

Social and Emotional Competencies

While existing models of SEC vary significantly in terms of the number and nature of skills they encompass, there is general agreement among researchers as to what they should include. To successfully navigate socially and emotionally challenging situations, SEC should include elements such as self-awareness, recognition of one's own emotions, and emotion regulation (i.e., intrapersonal) on the one hand, and awareness of others' emotions and relationship skills on the other (i.e., interpersonal) (Aldrup et al., 2020; Soto et al., 2022).

With the aim of developing a comprehensive framework for SEC, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2003) has taken the lead in mapping SEC and conducting research in this expanding field. They

developed a conceptual model of SEC that has since been widely used by researchers and practitioners, and groups them into five interrelated competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Since self-awareness and self-management focus primarily on the self, they are often viewed as emotional, rather than social competencies. However, some elements of these competencies are indeed social in their nature, which is why SEC are best considered as one, comprehensive set of competencies. *Self-awareness* includes directing awareness to one's own emotions and values, recognising them and understanding the way in which emotions influence one's behaviour and decision-making. *Self-management* can be described as a set of competencies that include self-awareness, but also require the regulation of emotions, thoughts and behaviours. It is considered crucial for managing challenging and stressful situations, as well as maintaining motivation, setting and achieving goals. Some researchers argue that the relationship between self-awareness and self-management can be described as hierarchical, meaning that self-awareness is a necessary prerequisite for self-management and that emotionally competent people are more successful at emotion regulation because they direct more attention to their emotions and are more aware of their thoughts and feelings (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Mayer et al., 2016).

Social awareness and relationship skills are dimensions from the CASEL model that can be seen as predominantly social competencies, since they require contact with other people, although they also include important elements of emotional competence. *Social awareness* includes empathy, perspective-taking, and awareness of individual differences, including awareness of social constructs such as prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes. *Relationship skills*, on the other hand, include important interpersonal skills such as communication skills (active listening, clear and respectful communication), conflict management, resisting social pressures, and avoiding risky or destructive behaviours. *Responsible decision-making* includes taking into account one's own emotions and those of others while considering different options and their consequences.

More recently, Soto et al. (2021, 2022) have sought to develop a comprehensive framework for social, emotional, and behavioural skills (SEB) and thus provide an opportunity for researchers in the field to synthesise their work within a model that is both psychometrically sound and integrative. Soto et al. (2021) argue that existing taxonomies of non-cognitive skills such as the CASEL model, the Five C's of Positive Youth Development (Lerner et al., 2005), or the Tripartite Taxonomy of Character (Park et al., 2017) overlap with the Big Five personality traits, thus providing a framework for a more comprehensive model of social, emotional and behavioural skills. They define SEB as capacities to maintain social relationships, regulate emotions, and manage goal- and learning-oriented behaviours, and organise them into five domains: social engagement skills, cooperation skills, self-management skills, emotional resilience skills, and innovation skills. These five

domains are similar and, to some extent, comparable to the CASEL model – social engagement and cooperation skills can be compared to social awareness and relationship skills, whereas self-management and emotional resilience skills can be compared to self-awareness and self-management. To break down these relations, we must turn to considering SEC within a wider domain of individual differences, particularly when it comes to educational research.

As can be seen from both the CASEL and SEB model, SEC as a construct are closely related to various cognitive and non-cognitive constructs in the domain of individual differences, such as emotional intelligence and personality. These constructs have been extensively researched in the educational context, and have been proven relevant for a wide variety of positive outcomes at the student, teacher, and school level (Brackett et al., 2006; Kim et al., 2019). Therefore, emotional intelligence and personality may be useful to understand individual differences in teachers' SEC (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and to derive hypotheses about their role in occupational well-being. In the following sections, the role of emotional intelligence and personality in educational outcomes and occupational well-being will be discussed, as well as their relation to SEC.

Conceptual Relations to Emotional Intelligence and Personality

Emotional intelligence (EI) has been widely researched during the last couple of decades, and has attracted considerable interest from both the academic community and the general public. While its appeal lies in its seemingly comprehensive premise that people possess a set of abilities related to processing emotional information that can contribute to various positive life outcomes (Salovey et al., 2003), the field has developed with a significant amount of debate about the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence. Accordingly, there are three distinct types of EI theories: trait models, ability models, and mixed models. Trait models perceive EI as “emotional self-perceptions located at the lower levels of personality hierarchies” (Petrides, 2010, p. 137), thus taking into account both the stability of EI and the subjectivity of emotional experiences. On the other hand, ability models (e.g., Goleman, 2001; Mayer et al., 2016) view emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive and express emotions, to understand them, and to regulate them in oneself and in others. Mixed models (e.g., Bar-On, 2007) describe EI as a compound that encompasses abilities, dispositions, and traits.

While models of SEC recognise that certain traits may be relevant to their development, by their focus on the malleability of SEC they are closer to ability or mixed models of EI. However, the relationship between EI and SEC remains unclear, and leading researchers in the field of SEL recognise that certain overlap exists between EI and SEL (Zins et al., 2007), while some researchers even use the terms such as EI and emotional competence interchangeably (Palomera et al., 2008; Rey et al., 2016). Zins et al. (2007) note that one of the key differences between EI and SEL

lies in addressing social awareness and interpersonal skills, as well as responsible decision-making, whereas EI theorists place greater focus on the role of emotions in personal functioning. However, since emotional abilities contribute to optimal social functioning (Brackett et al., 2006), they are also relevant for functioning in a social context.

As mentioned, EI has been widely researched in the educational setting, particularly in relation to teacher outcomes. The findings on the relationship between EI and teacher outcomes can thus serve as a basis for research on the role of SEC in teachers' occupational well-being. Higher EI has been associated with greater job satisfaction, positive affect, as well as lower burnout (Brackett et al., 2010; Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017) and reducing stress in teachers (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Higher EI has also been associated with the perception of higher social support from colleagues and superiors (Ju et al., 2015), which can mitigate the consequences of burnout.

Personality is another construct in the domain of individual differences that can be associated with SEC. According to broad definitions of personality, it refers to unique personal characteristics that influence an individual's behaviour, thoughts, and feelings in different situations and are relatively stable over time (Kim et al., 2019). While there are numerous frameworks within personality research, the Big Five is considered the predominant personality framework. The Big Five framework views personality in terms of five dimensions or traits: extraversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness (John et al. 2008; McCrae & Costa, 1999). As is the case with EI, significant overlap exists between personality and SEC, to the extent that some researchers have even proposed models of SEC parallel to the Big Five domains (Primi et al., 2016; Soto et al., 2022). Of the five personality traits, the two most closely related to SEC are agreeableness and emotional stability. According to Graziano and Tobin (2009), agreeableness can be viewed as individual differences in how likeable or pleasant a person is in their relations with others, and can, therefore, be seen as an integral element of social competence. On the other hand, emotional stability can be perceived as an element of emotional competence, as it defines how individuals cope with (particularly unpleasant) emotions. Although personality traits and competencies are usually related, Soto et al. (2021) argue that they cannot be considered equivalent. They note that traits are consistent over time and across situations, whereas competencies determine how someone is capable of behaving in certain situations. Consequently, traits are viewed as stable, while competencies have the potential to be altered through training or intervention.

Given the similarities between personality and SEC, findings from personality research may also prove useful for considering the role of SEC in teacher-related outcomes. To summarise the findings on teacher personality, Kim et al. (2019) conducted a meta-analysis of studies which examined the effects of teacher personality (namely Big Five personality traits) on two job-related outcomes (teacher

effectiveness and burnout). They found that the Big Five traits (with the exception of agreeableness) are positively related to teacher effectiveness, while emotional stability, extraversion, and conscientiousness are negatively associated with burnout.

Unlike emotional intelligence and personality, research on SEC places a strong emphasis on developing these competencies in the educational context, which is why a limited, yet growing body of research has been focused on developing these competencies in teachers under the premise that they serve an important purpose for student outcomes, as well as teacher well-being.

Teachers' Social and Emotional Competencies

According to a meta-analysis conducted by Durlak et al. (2011), social and emotional learning programmes have positive effects on students' behaviour and attitudes. Participation in these programmes reduces aggressive and risky behaviour, while also increasing academic performance, grade point average, and prosocial behaviour. Moreover, it has a positive impact on students' attitudes toward themselves, others, and schools. However, these programmes alone are not sufficient to foster the development of students' social and emotional competencies, as their implementation is often time-limited, and their impact is modest. In order to provide sustainable impact, a whole-school approach to developing these competencies, and a positive school climate are required. Therefore, it is suggested that greater emphasis be placed on the development of teachers' SEC to empower them to adequately support their students and consequently foster their SEC (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). However, SEC are often seen as somewhat embedded in the teacher role, and not much attention is directed toward developing these competencies in teachers. In fact, considering these competencies are not taught in teachers' pre-service education, research suggests that many teachers, especially beginning teachers, lack these competencies or could use additional support in their pre-service and in-service development (Hadar et al., 2020).

Research on the development of teachers' SEC is still in its inception. There exists a need for in-depth empirical research on the role of these competencies in various outcomes at the student, teacher, and school level. As a framework for the research on teachers' SEC, most authors turn to the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This model emphasises the importance of teachers' SEC, as well as their well-being, for a variety of student outcomes, but also outcomes on the classroom and school level, such as school climate. Although the focus of the model lies on student outcomes, this model also recognises the importance of teacher well-being which can be influenced by various elements of the school context.

According to the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), teachers with strong SEC support the development of these competencies in their students, which is positively related to students' academic achievement (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers' SEC

also contribute to effective classroom management and healthy teacher-student relationships, which in turn support the development of a healthy classroom climate. Furthermore, SEL programmes for teachers have been found to increase their well-being (Mihic et al., 2020). However, when teachers lack resources to cope with social and emotional challenges in the classroom, this can also impact students' performance (Marzano et al., 2003) and the deterioration of school climate, which can further exhaust teachers and lead to reduced well-being and burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). With this in mind, we will first turn to examining elements of teachers' occupational well-being, and then discuss their relations with teachers' SEC.

Teachers' Occupational Well-Being

Occupational well-being includes subjective and objective indicators of physical, mental, and social well-being in the work context, both positive (e.g., good physical health, job satisfaction) and negative (e.g., illness, emotional exhaustion, burnout) (Zacher & Schmitt, 2016). Occupational well-being is especially relevant in demanding and stressful professions, where workers need more resources to cope with their everyday work tasks. Numerous studies indicate that teaching is one of the most stressful professions (Brackett et al., 2010; Maslach et al., 2001; Schonert-Reichl, 2017) and that work-related stress combined with lack of personal and organisational resources for coping with it is one of the primary reasons teachers decide to leave the profession (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Teacher attrition is becoming a growing challenge for educational systems internationally, with aspects of occupational well-being proving central to the decision to leave the teaching profession (Madigan & Kim, 2021; OECD, 2020). Meanwhile, not much attention is paid to the occupational health and well-being of teachers and supporting them in this aspect through pre-service and in-service training.

Since teacher attrition has significant consequences on educational systems, research has been dedicated to identifying teachers at risk of leaving the profession. According to recent analyses of teacher attrition, almost half of new teachers decide to leave the teaching profession in the first 5 years of their careers (Sims & Jerrim, 2020). This suggests that attrition rates are high in early-career teachers, who often have difficulties making the transition from university to work (Friedman, 2000). However, according to a meta-analysis conducted by Borman and Dowling (2008), attrition rates are also high among teachers later in their career. Attrition is also more frequent among maths and science teachers, female teachers and teachers who are married and have children (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

In Croatia, teachers perceive their profession as important but challenging, while also pointing out that the profession is not valued in society, which is reflected in their working conditions, salary, and overall perception of their work as non-demanding. They also point out that they are satisfied with their work, but dissatisfied

with their working conditions (OECD, 2020; Slišković et al., 2017). Around a third of Croatian teachers express a desire to leave the teaching profession (OECD, 2020; Radeka & Sorić, 2006). As more and more qualified workers migrate to other countries within the European Union and beyond, Croatia is beginning to face the problem of recruiting, hiring and retaining teachers (Marušić et al., 2017). These findings suggest that raising awareness about teachers' occupational well-being and implementing policies to support it can be beneficial not only for teachers and their students, but for entire educational systems and communities. As a multidimensional construct, occupational well-being in teachers has primarily been researched in terms of burnout and job satisfaction.

Burnout and Work Engagement

Since burnout is considered a major problem among teachers (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000), a large body of research exists which investigates its predictors, manifestations, and consequences. According to the most widespread conceptualisation of burnout, burnout is seen as a psychological, work-related syndrome characterised by three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). However, more recently, Schaufeli et al. (2020) have argued that this conceptualisation suffers from several shortcomings regarding its psychometric characteristics and applicability. Accordingly, Schaufeli et al. (2020) have developed a new conceptualisation which includes four core dimensions of burnout – exhaustion, cognitive impairment, emotional impairment, and mental distance. They also included secondary dimensions which often accompany these core symptoms, and have divided them into three categories: depressed mood, psychological distress, and psychosomatic complaints. Nevertheless, the majority of what is known about teacher burnout stems from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1997).

In teachers, burnout is often a result of frequent, challenging, and intense contact with students, resulting in cynical attitudes toward students and feelings of ineffectiveness and low self-efficacy (Rey et al., 2016). Common causes of teacher burnout also include students behaviour and discipline problems (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007), time pressure (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010), high workload (Chang, 2009), criticism, and lack of recognition and reward (Friedman, 2000), to name a few. There are also considerable individual differences between teachers in their reactions to stress and burnout (Bauer et al., 2006), as well as their manifestations (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). According to Chang's (2009) review of teacher burnout literature, there are three types of factors contributing to burnout: individual factors, organisational factors, and transactional factors (interactions between individual and organisational factors).

Often considered a counterpart of burnout (González-Romá et al., 2006), work engagement is another aspect of occupational well-being relevant for teachers. Work

engagement can be defined as a “positive, fulfilling, affective-motivational state of work-related well-being characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (Bakker et al., 2008, p. 187). Therefore, work engagement contributes to personal well-being by increasing optimism, self-efficacy, and self-esteem, as well as organisational success through fostering work performance and reducing turnover (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), which is why it is relevant to examine it in various work settings. In line with research conducted in organisational settings, teachers' work engagement is strongly related to their teaching performance (Bakker & Bal, 2010), their turnover intentions (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004), and to the engagement of their students (Roth et al., 2007). Engaged teachers are intrinsically motivated, display energy, complete their tasks effectively, and are able to deal with the challenges that arise during their work days (Klassen et al., 2012). Burnout and work engagement are significantly related to outcomes such as job satisfaction and, consequently, teacher attrition, which is why they are worth considering in the educational context, especially when it comes to early-career teachers who are most at risk of attrition (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Madigan & Kim, 2021).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is generally regarded as a positive or negative evaluative judgement that employees develop about their jobs (Weiss, 2002). As one of the most important indicators of occupational well-being, the job satisfaction of teachers has been extensively researched (Ferguson et al., 2012). In their analysis of predictors of teacher job satisfaction, Kim and Loadman (1994) found seven statistically significant predictors: salary, promotion opportunities, professional challenge, professional autonomy, working conditions, interactions with colleagues, and interactions with students. Stress has been found to significantly impact job satisfaction (Ferguson et al., 2012), as well as increased administration and paperwork which increases their workload (Scott et al., 2001). Teachers also note that their profession has experienced a decline in status and as such has been exposed to significant criticism on behalf of students and their parents, which also results in their lower job satisfaction (Scott et al., 2001). When it comes to demographic characteristics, Ferguson et al. (2012) found that years of teaching experience significantly predicted job satisfaction in that more experienced teachers demonstrate higher job satisfaction. This is consistent with the findings that younger teachers have lower job satisfaction than older teachers (Sargent & Hannum, 2005), and are more likely to consider leaving the profession (OECD, 2020), which has important implications for preventing teacher attrition. While higher job satisfaction leads to increased performance (Judge et al., 2001), low job satisfaction is associated with burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009) and intention of leaving the teaching profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Teachers' SEC and Occupational Well-Being

While there is some evidence that SEC are related to teachers' occupational well-being by influencing the way teachers cope with emotional challenges in their everyday work (Chan, 2006; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and thus represent potential psychological resources which can mitigate burnout and other negative outcomes, research in this area is still scarce, and it is unclear how specific SEC are related to various elements of occupational well-being. In this regard, SEC can be explored within the framework of the job demands-resources model (JD-R; Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker et al., 2023), as moderators of the relationship between job demands and burnout or work engagement.

The JD-R theory supposes that all work environments or job characteristics can be modelled using two categories, namely job demands and job resources, which trigger two independent processes – a health impairment process and a motivation process (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Job demands refer to physical, psychological, social, or organisational aspects of the job which require continuous effort and are consequently associated with psychological or physiological costs (Demerouti et al., 2001). Typical job demands associated with the teaching profession include work overload and time pressure, student misconduct, and lack of autonomy, and have often been associated with occupational stress, exhaustion, burnout, and health complaints (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007, 2010). Even if the demands of the workplace are not always considered negative, problems arise when the employee lacks resources to cope with the demands. Job resources, therefore, refer to physical, psychological, social or organisational aspects of the job that serve the employee in achieving work-related goals, reduce job demands and the associated psychological and physiological costs, promote personal growth, and meet basic psychological needs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Demerouti et al., 2001). Examples of job resources include social support, autonomy, feedback, and development opportunities (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014), and have been associated with work enjoyment, motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014; Bakker et al., 2007). More recently, the model has been expanded to include personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, self-esteem) which can supplement job resources.

An important proposition presented by the JD-R theory is that job demands and resources interact in predicting occupational well-being and that their interaction can consequently influence work performance. The interaction between job demands and resources involves resources buffering the impact of job demands on exhaustion. Through the proposed buffering process, resources are expected to reduce the detrimental effects of job demands on negative outcomes. That being said, research that would regard SEC as personal resources that could moderate the relationship between job demands and burnout has yet to be conducted. As such, this presents a promising line of research with important implications for teacher pre-service

education, as well as providing them with necessary in-service support and training. In the following sections, we will provide an overview of the existing research on the relationship between SEC and occupational well-being.

Research on the role of emotional self-awareness in occupational well-being mostly stems from research on mindfulness. According to Kabat-Zinn (2003, p. 145), one of the pioneers in the field of mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness is “the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment”. As such, mindfulness includes focusing one’s attention to the present moment and activities, as well as non-judgmental awareness of experience (Bishop et al., 2004). Since self-awareness (one of the key SEC) involves bringing awareness to one’s own emotions and values, recognising them, and understanding how they influence behaviour and decision-making, it can be considered one of the key elements of mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness can be examined as a trait (i.e., how mindful a teacher is in general), but it can also be developed through mindfulness-based interventions incorporated in teacher training (Brown et al., 2007). Though research on mindfulness in education is still limited, a growing body of evidence suggests that both trait mindfulness and mindfulness supported by interventions can have positive effects on various aspects of occupational well-being. Regarding trait mindfulness, Abenavoli et al. (2013) found that mindfulness in teachers was negatively associated with all three components of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation, and low personal accomplishment. Similarly, Braun et al. (2019) found that teachers’ mindfulness was related to lower levels of burnout, anxiety and depression. Regarding the effects of mindfulness interventions on teachers’ occupational well-being, a meta-analysis of the effects of mindfulness training on teacher well-being (Zarate et al., 2019) found that mindfulness-based interventions have significant positive effects on reducing stress and anxiety, depression, as well as burnout. Similarly, Hwang et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review of mindfulness interventions for in-service teachers, and found that mindfulness-based interventions have helped reduce burnout and stress in teachers.

Another important aspect of SEC is self-management. Self-management has been widely examined in relation to teachers’ occupational well-being through the concept of emotion regulation, as teachers are constantly exposed to emotionally challenging situations which often require a high degree of self-regulated behaviour (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, coping with their own unpleasant emotional responses is considered one of the main sources of stress for teachers (Sutton, 2004) and emotion regulation plays an important role in teacher burnout (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Emotion regulation refers to the “processes by which individuals influence which emotions they have, when they have them, and how they experience and express these emotions” (Gross, 1998, p. 275). While individuals may be predisposed to a certain degree of emotional reactivity, emotion management skills are relevant to how the individual deals with emotions once they are activated

(Aldrup et al., 2020). According to Gross (1998), people use various emotion regulation strategies, which can be grouped into five forms: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. When it comes to the role that emotion regulation plays in teacher well-being, emotion regulation is positively related to job satisfaction and personal accomplishment, one of the components of burnout, and negatively related to emotional exhaustion, another component of burnout (Brackett et al., 2010; Carson et al., 2011). Furthermore, empirical research suggests that different strategies can have adverse effects on well-being – problem-solving and cognitive reappraisal are associated with higher levels of well-being and job satisfaction, while suppression is related to lower job satisfaction and lower well-being (Burić et al., 2017, 2021; Taxer & Frenzel, 2015; Tsouloupas et al., 2010).

When it comes to social awareness, empathy appears to be one of the characteristics most clearly related to teachers' occupational well-being. According to a definition by Davis (1983), empathy refers to the reactions of one person to the observed experiences of another. This broad definition may be useful for examining empathy as a multidimensional construct, which includes both cognitive and emotional responses to another's experiences. Davis (1983) proposed that empathy can be considered as a set of four interrelated constructs: fantasy, perspective-taking, empathic concern, and personal distress, whereby fantasy and perspective-taking can be considered cognitive aspects of empathy, while empathic concern and personal distress can be considered emotional aspects of empathy. Fantasy refers to the tendency to identify with fictional characters, for example, in movies, books, or plays. Perspective taking, on the other hand, concerns attempts to consider the perspectives of other people and try to see the situation from their point of view. Empathic concern refers to feelings of warmth, compassion, and concern for others, whereas personal distress includes personal feelings of anxiety and discomfort as a result of observing another person's unpleasant experience (Davis, 1980). Existing research suggests that empathy is positively related to burnout, i.e., the more empathic a teacher is, the more likely he or she is to experience burnout (Medvedskaya & Sheryagina, 2017; Wróbel, 2013). However, certain aspects of empathy appear to make the teacher more susceptible to burnout – according to Medvedskaya and Sheryagina (2017), of the four aspects of empathy (perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress), only personal distress was significantly related to burnout, which emphasises the importance the teacher's own experience of unpleasant emotions.

Significant insights into the importance of empathy in teacher burnout stem from the research of Bakker and Schaufeli (2000). Drawing from evidence on emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993), they hypothesised that burnout would be more prevalent among teachers whose colleagues are also burnt out, triggering a process dubbed "burnout contagion" (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000; Meredith et al., 2020). Since burnout symptoms are often visible to colleagues, they found that

burnout was more likely to be “contagious” when teachers tend to talk to colleagues more often and discuss work- and student-related issues. Furthermore, burnout was more likely to be contracted by teachers who are highly susceptible to the emotions of others, which points to the role of empathy in experiencing burnout. These findings stress the importance of social context for developing burnout syndrome, and have significant implications for teacher training and strengthening a positive organisational climate in schools.

Teachers-student relations are the most common indicator of teachers' relationship skills, which is why they are especially relevant for improving classroom management. However, relationship skills are probably the most difficult competence to measure, since self-report measures are saturated with a high degree of socially desirable responses, and utilising other reports in the educational context can be quite a sensitive task. In fact, some researchers have found that teacher- and student-reports are often incongruent (e.g., Aldrup et al., 2018a), making it difficult to derive conclusions. This is probably one of the reasons why relationship skills have scarcely been researched in relation to teachers' well-being. According to the prosocial classroom model (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), the relationship between teachers' relations with students and their well-being is two-way – their relations with students influence their well-being, but teachers' well-being is also reflected in their relations with students. It appears that teachers with lower levels of well-being show less enthusiasm for building relations with students and are less involved with their students (Blase, 1986), while also demonstrating more strictness in the classroom (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1992). In addition, Aldrup et al. (2018b) found that the teacher-student relationship was positively related to teacher well-being and mediated the link between teacher-perceived misbehaviour and enthusiasm.

Taken together, findings on the role of SEC in teachers' occupational well-being demonstrate the complexity of their relationships. With that in mind, several challenges regarding this line of research need to be considered. The most prominent challenge lies in the diversity in conceptualisations of SEC, which makes it difficult to synthesise and review the findings. Moreover, individual competencies are often examined independently and measured by a variety of methods and instruments, which hinders the integration of these competencies into a comprehensive framework and the drawing of convincing conclusions. This line of research also overlaps with various other areas in the domain of individual differences, such as personality and emotional intelligence, making it fragmented, heterogeneous, and often incomprehensive. However, it provides a promising arena for exploring SEC as personal resources and possible buffers against the stressful everyday lives of teachers.

Methodological Approaches to Researching the Relationship Between Teachers' SEC and Their Occupational Well-Being

When discussing the role of SEC in outcomes such as occupational well-being, it has to be noted that researchers have yet to reach a consensus on how to adequately measure SEC, though significant progress is being made in the development of comprehensive instruments (e.g., Soto et al., 2022). Research in the field has also relied on various methodological approaches in order to explain the role of teachers' SEC in a number of relevant outcomes, such as occupational well-being. As is the case in psychological research in general (Spector, 2019), the majority of studies have used self-report measures and cross-sectional research designs to gain new insights into the relations between SEC and well-being.

Due to their lower cost and fewer challenges in terms of data collection, cross-sectional research design remains widely utilised in various research areas. Furthermore, since the exploration of the importance of teachers' SEC stems from research involving the use of social and emotional learning programmes, limited knowledge has also been gained through the use of quasi-experimental studies aimed at assessing the impact of such programmes (e.g., Jennings et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021) as well as a recent meta-analysis investigating the effect of SEL interventions on teachers burnout (Oliveira et al., 2021). However, longitudinal research that would allow researchers to discern causal relations between teachers' SEC and their occupational well-being is still scarce.

Indeed, while both cross-sectional and (rare) quasi-experimental research designs have informed researchers on the importance of teachers' SEC for their occupational well-being, the reciprocal relations between the two constructs remain unclear due to the prevalence of cross-sectional research. While some cross-sectional research can provide the opportunity to detect changes in constructs over time (e.g., through comparing different cohorts of teachers), it does not detect intraindividual changes due to using independent samples. Furthermore, cross-sectional designs cannot be used to infer conclusions of prediction, as they only imply relations that can go both ways. One of the advantages of using longitudinal research designs is that they take into account the temporal relations between variables (Schaie, 1983). Utilising longitudinal research designs, particularly full panel designs, could help shed more light on the relations between teachers' SEC and aspects of their occupational well-being, especially when it comes to reciprocal relations between these two constructs.

Conclusion

While there exists a burgeoning body of evidence on the relevance of SEC for teacher well-being, there is still a long way to go in terms of developing a comprehensive framework for future research and practice. Given their immense importance for various outcomes, it remains to be clarified whether (and if so, which) of these competencies can serve as protective factors against occupational stress and burnout. Furthermore, the mechanisms by which these competencies can serve as buffers against stress and burnout and contribute to teachers' occupational well-being remain under-researched and present a promising direction for future research. It would also be useful to identify risk factors in teachers in terms of their individual characteristics which make them more susceptible to burnout and lower occupational well-being, as this may help to target pre-service or in-service teachers in need of additional support and more tailor-made training programmes. Firstly, instruments measuring social and emotional competencies could be included during teacher assessment when entering university programmes and starting their jobs at school, in order to identify those teachers at risk of developing problems with controlling their emotions or becoming emotionally exhausted and disengaged at work. Furthermore, since all teachers (not just those at risk) can benefit from programmes aimed at developing social and emotional competencies, they can be included in pre-service and in-service teacher education programmes, which can help empower them and give them tools they can use when faced with emotionally challenging situations. Finally, including teachers in these programmes could help them facilitate SEC in their students as well, which can in turn also contribute to teachers' occupational well-being.

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Učiteljske socio-emocionalne kompetencije i njihova uloga u profesionalnoj dobrobiti

Sažetak

Učiteljska je profesija obilježena visokim razinama stresa i mnogobrojnim emocionalnim izazovima, posebno u ranoj fazi karijere. Dosadašnja istraživanja sugeriraju da su socio-emocionalne kompetencije učitelja povezane s njihovom profesionalnom dobrobiti jer utječu na način suočavanja sa svakodnevnim emocionalnim izazovima na poslu. To može upućivati na ulogu socio-emocionalnih kompetencija kao potencijalnih psiholoških resursa koji mogu ublažiti negativne ishode poput sagorijevanja i napuštanja profesije kod učitelja u ranoj fazi karijere. Međutim, istraživanja u ovome području još su uvijek malobrojna te je nejasno kako su pojedine socio-emocionalne kompetencije povezane s različitim aspektima profesionalne dobrobiti i odanošću učiteljskoj profesiji. Cilj je ovoga rada ponuditi pregled konceptualnih okvira socio-emocionalnih kompetencija i postojećih istraživanja u tome području, raspraviti o njihovoj ulozi u obrazovanju i usporediti ih sa srodnim konstruktima u domeni individualnih razlika. Nadalje, rad će pružiti pregled istraživanja profesionalne dobrobiti učitelja i relevantnosti učiteljskih socio-emocionalnih kompetencija za ishode kao što su sagorijevanje, angažiranost i zadovoljstvo poslom. Na kraju rada bit će predstavljeni metodološki aspekti mjerenja socio-emocionalnih kompetencija te osvrtno na izazove i smjernice za buduća istraživanja.

Cljučne riječi: učitelji, socio-emocionalne kompetencije, sagorijevanje, zadovoljstvo poslom

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