



DLSU Research Congress 2021
De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines
July 7 to 9, 2021

Pandemic Work Experience and Subjective Well Being of Early Childhood Education Teachers

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Abstract: Currently we are amidst the COVID19 pandemic. This phenomenon has caused a drastic shift from face to face learning to online learning. With this in mind teachers have had to adjust to this abrupt shift in teaching environment, while also dealing with other challenges brought about by the pandemic in various areas of their lives. In light of this the study investigated the pandemic work experience (PWE) and subjective well being (SWB) components: life satisfaction, PA, and NA of ECED teachers. They were surveyed with the Pandemic Experiences and Perceptions Survey (PEPS), Personal Well being Index (PWI-A), Scale of of Positive and Negative Experience (SPAN), and open text items that accompanied all measures. The correlation of these measures' scores were analyzed along with open text responses. Findings showed that respondents' had a highly positive PWE (23.63 average), high degree of life satisfaction (53.77 average), and overall PA balance (7.56 average). Among domains of PWE, perceptions of leadership was the most positively rated (60%) and the most negatively rated (43%) was risk perception in regards to contact control with the virus. Notably the workflow disruption domain was given an overall negative rating (53%) with open text responses indicating that limitations of digital rapport-building with students, unfamiliarity with digital tools, and the merging of work and home environments as contributing factors. In terms of SWB components, moderate positive correlation ($r=0.62$) was found between overall affect and life satisfaction. Furthermore, married respondents had higher SWB than singles, with a difference of 3.63. Older respondents had more positive PWE than younger respondents, as indicated by a low positive correlation between age and PWE ($r=0.32$).

Key Words: Pandemic Work Experience; Subjective Well being; Early Childhood Educators



1. INTRODUCTION

While online learning has been implemented prior to the COVID19 pandemic, the current situation has brought an abrupt surge in classes conducted solely online. Teachers have to fulfill their responsibilities in a quarantined environment while simultaneously worrying about infection risks, economical problems, and other quarantine issues. This may have a significant effect on their mental-emotional state, and by extension perceptions of their well being. With this in mind, this research aimed to assess to what extent the PWE (PWE) has affected the SWB (SWB) of early childhood education teachers in a Chinese Christian private school. This was done specifically in investigating the correlation of PWE and SWB; and the relationship repondents' demographic factors have with these two concepts.

Several studies have found that the occurrence of pandemics has, in one way or another, affected well being (Mehdinezhad, 2012; Rasskazova et. al., 2020). A circumstance unique to this pandemic is the increase of physical isolation for many worldwide. In light of this, the study also found that the decrease of social contact was strongly related to low psychological states (Sun et. al., 2020). Otu et. al. (2020) describes well being issues caused by COVID19 to cause psychological effects that will be widespread, persistent.

In contrast to objective well being, which is measured by medical diagnosis, SWB is defined by Diener et. al., (2000) as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life”. Its components include positive affect (PA), negative affect (NA), and life satisfaction (Tov & Diener, 2013). In broader terms it can be somewhat synonymous to the concept of happiness. Various factors influence one’s SWB, but despite fluctuations in one’s degree of SWB eventually returns to a baseline over time. This baseline is reportedly influenced by genetics (Røysamb, 2019). While degrees of SWB can be predisposed, certain factors under one’s personal control have influence on it as well. Faith is reportedly one such factor. Positive correlation between SWB and spiritual practice was observed by De Roca et. al. (2010). Furthermore, optimism was found to be a mediator of positive relationships between positive spiritual meaning-making and SWB. (EunHye & Nadres, 2013).

In light of all these, this research aimed to assess to what extent the pandemic has affected the SWB of early childhood education teachers in a Chinese Christian private school.

1.1 Research Questions

Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the PWE of ECED teachers ?
2. What is the current SWB of ECED teachers in terms of PA, NA, and life satisfaction (cognitive judgements of their quality of life)?
3. How does the PWE of ECED teachers affect their SWB?
4. What is the relationship of demographic profile to teachers’ SWB ?

1.2 Conceptual Framework

The research investigated relationships among PWE, SWB, with the demographic factors of the repondents. It is hypothesized that PWE affects the SWB of teachers. In this study, SWB is referred to as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener et. al., 2000). It is composed of PA, NA, and life satisfaction. Affective evaluation as a component of SWB involves prevalence of PA over NA (Kahneman et al., 1999). PA is often associated with positive constructs such as joy and confidence. In contrast NA is often associated with the negative such as anger and fear. The SWB component of life satisfaction, refers to one’s cognitive evaluations of their past to present life circumstances (Pavot and Diener, 2008).

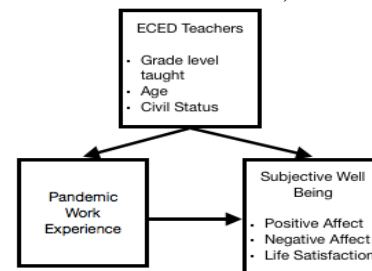


Figure 1. Conceptual framework for the study PWE and SWB of ECED Teachers

2. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a correlational research design, and employed primarily quantitative mixed methods. It used a convenience sample of 30 kinder to grade 3 teachers from a private Chinese Christian school with 5 female teachers per grade level. They are aged 24 to 58 years old, and 70% are married.



Three instruments were utilized. The Pandemic Experiences & Perceptions Survey (PEPS) by Dr. Michael P. Leiter (Mind Garden, 2020) is a 6-item survey designed to provide data on the following aspects of PWE – Workflow Disruption, Resources, Risk Perception, Impact on work life areas, and Perceptions of Leadership. The Personal Well being

Index (PWI-A) developed by the International Well being Group (2013) contains 7 items of satisfaction, each one corresponding to a certain domain of one's quality of life – standard of living, health, achieving in life, relationships, safety, community-connectedness, and future security. The Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE) is composed of 12 items, half of which assess PA (SPANE-P) and the other half NA (SPANE-N). It evaluates areas such as general state of interest, flow, positive engagement, and physical pleasure. In terms of construct validity it is reportedly appropriate in measuring emotional well being, with high internal consistency reliability. The instrument also possesses strict equivalence across the following factors: age, gender, marital status, and has a strong equivalence with income. Furthermore, it converges well with the PWI-A (Li et. al., 2013).

The sum of the PEPS scores served as a representation of the general PWE of respondents. A summed score of 30-26 would indicate highly positive PWE, and those ranging 25-21 indicate moderately positive PWE. Neutral PWE would have a score range of 20-16. In contrast scores between 15-11 are associated with moderately negative PWE, and those ranging 10-6 have highly negative PWE.

In regards to life satisfaction, the highest and lowest PWI-A scores are 0 and 70 respectively. Each of the 8 items are answerable on a 0-10 rating scale. A response of 0 indicates “No Satisfaction at All” while a 10 indicates “Completely Satisfied” per individual item. This study regards a score range of 0-13 as an indication of very low to no life satisfaction, 14-27 as low life satisfaction, 28-41 as moderate life satisfaction, 42-55 as high life satisfaction, and 56-70 as very high to complete life satisfaction. In relation to positive and NA, SPANE items are scored using a scale of 1 to 5—with 1 representing “very rarely or never” and 5 “very often or always”. The summed positive score otherwise referred to as SPANE-P may range from 6 to 30. Its counterpart negative scale otherwise known as SPANE-N has a similar range. By subtracting the negative score from the positive score, both SPANE-P

and SPANE-N scores can be combined into SPANE-B, a score for both positive and NA. These scores can range from -24 to 24 with Diener et. al. (2009) stating that the lowest score equates to the “unhappiest possible” and the highest score equates to the “highest affect balance possible.” Furthermore Diener states that the higher the score the more the frequent the respondent experiences positive feelings and vice versa.

Pearson r correlation, ANOVA and t-tests were conducted to determine the relationships of demographic factors and the variables measured by the study. The researcher also compiled open-text responses from each of the survey sections. Then an analysis of these responses' common themes were conducted.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 PWEs of ECED teachers

Repondents' group average PEPS score is 23.63 (SD=2.44), indicating a highly positive PWE overall. In terms of PEPS domains 53% responded that the pandemic had a large effect on their organization's work (workflow disruption); 43% rated support staff availability as mostly adequate (resources); 40% rated their contact control relating to the aforementioned factors as “Somewhat Adequate”(risk perception); 40% highly agreed that social support was felt with their work group (impact on work-life areas); and 60% reported that their immediate supervisor identified specific actions that would improve their capabilities “Frequently if not Always” (perceptions of leadership).

Notable factors that influenced these ratings are provisions that allow respondents to work from home, sense of family among colleagues, and their faith. Many reported difficulty with the shift to online teaching and merge of work-home environments. This difficulty was eased by internet allowance and equipment loans as these allowed teachers to work from home more effectively. Support staff assistance such as school doctor's medical advice on infection prevention, tech-hosting classes, and distribution of physical learning packets every quarter were also reported to be helpful. Contributors to the factors of work community being familial and respondents' faith include joint prayers integrated into the faculty's schedule, and faculty cell groups—which serve as Christ-centered emotional



and spiritual support group. Additionally, majority of open text responses mentioned personal relationship-based trust in God throughout the PEPS. Ögtem-Young (2016) states that a relationship between faith and resilience was observed among those who experienced loss, illness, and varying circumstances of separation from family. Findings of this study indicate that faith plays a positive role in coping with life events and stressors, as it provided believers with purpose and allowed for more clarity of situations regardless of the severity negative aspects had in their lives. This relationship has also been shown by several other studies (Elliott et. al, 2014; Xu, 2016). Apart from regular meetings focus on spiritual-emotional well being teachers also met periodically for evaluation, sharing of best practices, and addressing class-related issues. Respondents noted the ready availability of feedback for their concerns. Open communication, genuine concern for well being, and leading by example in terms of striving to grasp new technological skills unfamiliar to them were notable traits respondents described their supervisors with.

3.2 SWB of ECED teachers

Respondents' PWI-A scores indicated an average of 53.77 (SD = 9.56) indicating high life satisfaction. Two domains respondents are most satisfied with are religion and personal relationships. These results align with the previous mention of familial atmosphere among colleagues and the faculty practice of meeting together in cell groups. In contrast, the domain of community connectedness is where respondents are least satisfied with. The open text responses provide insight to this, as many have indicated the interpersonal restrictions of the "new normal" have had an effect on them. Notably the domain of personal safety and future security are also among the lowest rated in terms of life satisfaction. Open text responses relating to these have mentioned financial struggles, as well as doubts the government is capable of handling the pandemic effectively.

Respondents have a SPANE-B score is 7.56 (SD= 5.39) indicating an overall more PA. Much like the PWI-A responses, open text responses of those with PA scores have common themes of entrusting the future to God and focusing on the more positive

aspects of the pandemic situation. These responses also indicate a firm grasp of the reality of the negative aspects of the pandemic situation such as compromised interpersonal relationship-building, financial struggles, and the threat the virus poses to one's life. However, a significant number of these same open text responses also include a theme of hope based on a higher being. This result parallels the positive correlation between SWB and spiritual practice observed by De Roca et. al. (2010).

3.3 Relationship between PWE and SWB

The repondents' PEPS score has low positive correlation with SPANE-P ($r = 0.31$). This indicates that the more PA respondents' had the more positive their PWE is. In relation, open text SPANE responses have a common theme of hopefulness and optimism based on positive aspects of the situation. Mentions of faith and respondents' relationship with God was a common theme throughout open text answers. Perhaps since reliance on God is a factor influenced by the nature of a respondent's relationship with God rather than directly influenced by external circumstances, most respondents have highlighted it as a significant source of hope during this pandemic. Additionally, notable sources of PA included family and co-worker relationships. Furthermore, it is of note that PA correlated more strongly with PWE than total affect and NA. Thus, it can be said that the presence and intentional focus on these sources of PA are crucial factors in determining the nature of one's PWE.

It was observed that the PWI-A total has low correlation with SPANE P ($r = 0.478$), and a moderate correlation with SPANE N and SPANE B. This indicates that life satisfaction and PA possess a low correlation, and that life satisfaction is correlated to NA on a higher degree than PA. Furthermore a moderately correlated relationship between life satisfaction and overall affect is present. This confirms the internal consistency of SWB concepts.

3.4 Factors Relating to PWE and SWB

A low negative correlation between PEPS and Grade level was observed ($r = -0.38$). This indicates that those teaching older grade levels have a more negative PWE than those teaching younger levels. However, no significant difference in the PWEs of teachers across grade levels was found (p -



value = 0.086). Furthermore, it was confirmed that parents and guardians were allowed to monitor and assist pre-nursery to kinder students in staying on-task during class, while those of Grade 1 students and above were not allowed to do the same. Perhaps this contributes to the difference observed between teachers handling older and younger grade levels—as having an adult physically present with the student enhances overall ease of class management. This results is may also be due a low negative correlation ($r = -0.39$) between age and grade level taught. Thus, older teachers reportedly have higher PA and PWE handling the younger grade levels who have their parents or guardians by them physically during online class.

Older age has a low correlation to the SWB component of PA ($r = 0.30$) and positive degrees of PWE ($r = 0.31$). This indicates that older teachers experience more positive affect and PWE. Additionally, being married was found to have moderately positive correlation with SPANE B, implying that those with spouse have an overall higher affect balance compared to singles. This claim is further strengthened as a difference of 6.37 was found between the mean SPANE scores of single and married respondents. Furthermore, several SPANE open text responses indicated that family as a crucial factor influencing teacher affect during this pandemic.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Among all findings the most notable is that PA plays a larger role in determining PWE than NA. With this in mind, it can be said that the presence of sources of positive emotion are more significant than sources of negative emotion in determining how one perceives, and by extension copes, with a situation such as the pandemic. Thus, formation, identification, and intentional focus on PA sources is recommended.

On an administrative level it is advised to create opportunities for more PA sources to be added among their teachers. This may come in the school's version of a "cell group", opportunities for reflective thanksgiving incorporated into teacher schedules, and fostering a familial work culture. Furthermore, it is of note that degrees of PWE were influenced by administrative support to teachers in terms of internet allowance, and technical support among other practical assistances.

On an individual level, relationship with a higher being, co-workers, and family were shown to be significant factors in solidifying respondents' sources of PA. These relationships were implied to be sources of hope as well in open text responses. Thus fostering and growing relationships during this time of increased physical isolation can be beneficial to coping with the challenges of the pandemic. It can also be inferred that the more solid a relationship is the more hope it produces in the face of circumstances such as this pandemic. Furthermore, life satisfaction had no significant correlation to demographic factors nor PWE. Thus, it can be inferred that life satisfaction is not majorly determined by age, civil status, nor the pandemic's effect on one's work. Perhaps since the construct is said to be cognitive evaluations one's circumstances (Pavot and Diener, 2008) one's personal perception of external circumstances, rather than these circumstances themselves, plays a prominent role in determining life satisfaction.

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