

The Predictor and Outcome of Social Support Giving – A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

“Social support” encompasses teachers’ patience and help regarding content learning as well as their personal interest in their students (Aldrup, Klusmann, Lüdtke, Göllner, & Trautwein, 2018). It is a feature of instructional behaviour that is positively associated with student learning (Suldo et al., 2009), an engaged behaviour of enthusiastic teachers (Kunter et al, 2008), and an essential aspect of effective teaching (Lam, 2019). Social support behaviour is conceived as altruistic and is associated positively with support givers’ well-being (Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). While the importance of teachers’ social support for the development of learners is well-documented (Aldrup, et al., 2018), how giving social support to students impact teachers’ well-being has been less well studied. Our study attempts to fill such research gap.

This study examines the predictor and outcome of teachers’ provision of social support. It investigates whether ‘basic psychological need satisfaction at work’ (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) is associated with ‘well-being’ (engagement, psychological meaningfulness, and health), and whether such a predicted relationship can be mediated by ‘social support giving’. This mediation model is constructed upon the self-determination theory, highlighting the meaningful integration of the individual self into the social environment as a necessary condition of growth (Ryan, Ryan, Di Domenico, & Deci, 2019). It also makes reference to the beneficial effect of social support provision as addressed in health psychology.

A battery of questionnaires of 47 items in total will be administered to 300 school teachers who teach junior secondary levels, in Hong Kong schools of varying backgrounds. The measurements include Social Support, Basic Satisfaction Need at Work, Engagement, Psychological Meaningfulness and Health. Translation and back-translation, and pilot study will be conducted on the scales. Structural equation modelling will explore the extent to which teachers’ basic psychological need predicts teacher well-being, with the provision of social support giving as a mediating factor. This sophisticated multivariate analysis allows investigation of how different variables are interconnected as the results.

The study contributes to scholarship by extending the application of self-determination theory to study teachers’ well-being, with a connection to social support giving. Its findings should expand our understanding of teacher well-being in terms of potential association to teachers’ support to students and psychological need at-work; adding value to previous studies on teacher satisfaction. The study has the potential to generate suggestions for supporting teacher development and impact society by rekindling social support, if the results identify social support as significant.