

The Role of Person and Perceived Situation Variables leading to Job Well-Being of International School Teachers

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Introduction

In a world that is moving at a tremendous pace, working in international schools has its very special demands and challenges. The focal point of this study was teachers who work in international schools and this research aimed to understand the role of the variables, both within an individual, and outside in the work environment, on the outcome of “job well-being” of these teachers.

One of the important aims of this research was to provide a documentation of the special challenges for the teachers who work in dynamic environment of international schools in Thailand. In Thailand, most of the international schools are registered with a body called “ISAT” or the *International Schools Association of Thailand*. According to the official website (www.isat.or.th) of “ISAT”, starting from 45 original members in 1994, ISAT has now over 70 member schools offering a range of curricula from American, British and International systems. A leading Thai newspaper, Bangkok Post published a special supplement on “International Education in Thailand” (2005) and mentioned that the growth of

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international education over the last 15 years, at all levels in Thailand, is truly breathtaking. Most of these international schools employ teachers of different nationalities including Thai nationals, working to meet the challenges of international education.

Job Well-Being of International School Teachers

Review of relevant literature indicates that teaching is a particularly stressful occupation, with the stressful aspects of teaching also leading to burnout amongst the teachers (Russell, Altmaier, & Velzen, 1987). Moreover, for teachers working in international schools, the usual stress of teaching is compounded by the task of adjusting to a multicultural environment of an international school (Hayden & Thompson, 2000). Working in international schools there is an additional demand on the teachers not just in terms of delivering their academic goals but also to deal with the multicultural needs of the various student communities studying in their institutions.

To meet the requirements of the international education it is important to first understand what happens to its main resources- the teachers, who deliver the required tenets of education. This research gave a platform to find information about the variables that may have an influence on the job well-being of these teachers in their specific work environment.

Now, the construct of “job well-being” refers to an individual’s feelings or state-of-mind regarding the nature of their work. According to Warr (1999), the general construct of job well-being refers to the extent to which a person feels satisfied with his or her job as a whole. The concept was built up by Van Katwyk, Fox, Spector, and Kelloway (2000) from

the original concept of overall “affective well-being” by Warr (1990). The concept is not just of only theoretical interest but also applied, as the research-based knowledge gained from it can be used in actual life to have interventions done to improve the job well-being of employees, which is linked to organizational effectiveness.

The feelings of job well-being are influenced by factors within the individual and also out side in his/her environment. The research was designed to investigate the impact of the perceived situational variables (or the work characteristics such as workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors) and the person related variables (of work locus of control, self-efficacy, and self- esteem) on the job well-being of international school teachers.

Job Well-Being and the Person Related Variables

Work domain-specific personality variables were selected to understand their impact on job well-being. Research works (Judge & Bono, 1994; Judge et al., 2005) indicate that job well-being can be influenced by a variety of *internal factors* (the individual’s personality). The *raison d’être* for choosing the specific personality variables is based on the theory of “core self-evaluations” that has been put forth by Judge and Bono (2002). The authors refer to the broad personality construct of “core self-evaluations” which has an impact on the work outcome of job satisfaction. The theory states that the core self evaluation traits of self-esteem, generalized self efficacy, neuroticism and locus of control have a strong empirical association which influences their overall impact on occupational outcomes of job satisfaction and job performance. Taking this into consideration and the previously researched concept of work locus of control (Mohan, 2004), the personality constructs of work locus of control, teacher

self-efficacy and self-esteem were selected for the research study.

Work Locus of Control measures a person's generalized control belief in the organizational settings. The work locus of control can be either internal or external. The higher scores in the current study represent "external" orientation of work locus of control.

Teacher Self-Efficacy refers to a sense of personal competence of teacher to deal efficiently with a variety of stressful situations at the professional or work domain related to teaching. It measures an individual's belief in his or her own ability to accomplish a specific task, and can be positive or in a negative direction. The higher scores on the scale used in the study represent high belief in a teacher's self-efficacy.

Self-Esteem refers to an individual's sense of his or her value or worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself. The higher an individual scores, the higher is the reported self-esteem in the current research.

Job Well-Being and the Perceived Situation Variables

The research in the area of job well-being has also indicated the influence of *external factors* such as the quality of one's relationship with his/her supervisor, the quality of the physical environment in which they work, degree of fulfillment with their work (Spector, 1988). The factors in the workplace, related to the demands of the work situation also influence job well-being of an individual and are termed as the "perceived situation variables" in the current study. These factors related to work place that are perceived by the individual as demands reveal the extent of the "perceived stress" of the teachers.

This research investigated the perceived impact of the situation variables of workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors on the job well-being of teachers. Questions measuring each of the four perceived situation variable showed that high scores indicted high levels of perceived stress by the individual. Each of the variables has research based evidence with job well-being and stress. Extreme demand and work overload can produce extensive strain (Caplan & Jones, 1975). Research indicates that conflict within the work domain can be a powerful source of job stress (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The role that an individual has in an organization serves the important function of coordinating individual member's behaviour (Jex, 1998). But the particular role the individual plays within the organization can lead to occupational stress (Buunk et al., 1998). Individuals face problems arising with reference to the status, recognition, material (e.g., pay) and symbolic (e.g., designation) rewards at work. According to Buunk et al. (1998), the low status of a profession may affect employees' well-being negatively, particularly when they feel they are entitled to more.

The basic aims of this research were two pronged- to contribute to theoretical knowledge related to job well-being; and from the perspective of applied behavioral science research, the knowledge that accrues from this research would be helpful in promoting job well-being of teachers working in international schools.

Hypotheses

Based on the review of literature four hypotheses were proposed for the research:

1. The person variables of individual self-beliefs— work locus of control (internal orientation), teacher self-efficacy and

self esteem; will be positively correlated with the job well-being.

2. The perceived situation variables (of workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors) will be negatively correlated to the job well being of the teachers.
3. The job well-being of different demographic groups (according to age, gender, nationality, and marital status) will differ.
4. There will be significant relationships between the independent (exogenous) variables of personality and perceived situation, and the dependent (endogenous) variable of job well-being of the international schoolteachers, such that:
 - 4.1 The personality variables of self-beliefs (work locus of control, teacher self-efficacy and self esteem) will have direct positive effect on the job well being of the international schoolteachers.
 - 4.2 The perceived situation variables (of workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors) will have direct negative effect on the job well being of the international schoolteachers.

Methods

This research was framed to study the relationship between the following variables: the two blocks of independent variables which were the person variables at work (work locus of control, self-esteem and teacher self-efficacy) and the perceived situation variables (workload, interpersonal conflict,

role stress, and career security factors); and the dependent variable of Job well-being.

Participants

The target population for the study was the teachers working in the international schools following the British curriculum, in Bangkok, Thailand. Overall 26 schools followed the British curriculum, and only four out of the ten schools approached, agreed to give data for this research. The sample for the study were 82 teachers, both males ($n=17$) and females ($n=65$), as well as Thai ($n=16$) and non-Thai ($n=66$), were working in 4 different international schools, located in Bangkok.

Materials

The method of obtaining information on each of the variables from the sample in the study was phased, first through the use of interview method and then through the use of survey questionnaires. In the preliminary phase, the researcher first conducted interviews from a few members of the sample to gain information about the important perceived situational variables. In the second phase, a survey questionnaire was designed using the items from existing instruments for measuring each variable. A pilot study was conducted and the content analysis of the survey questionnaire was carried out. The total instrument for the survey consisted of 72 items measuring the variables for the research and 16 items for the demographic details.

Procedure

A mixed method approach of research was used to collect relevant information and measure the selected variables and to determine whether the hypothesized relationships exist

between them. The data was collected from the sample in two phases:

Phase 1: Interview method was used to collect preliminary information about the relevant work demands of the teachers working in international schools. This information was useful in determining the important perceived situation variables for the study.

Phase 2: A survey method was used. A questionnaire was used for data collection from the sample. The questionnaire measured the responses for each of the study variables.

The hypothesized relationships were tested by the use of various statistical techniques like correlation analyses, t-tests (using SPSS, v.11), and structural equation modeling using LISREL (v.12).

Results

Demographic analyses of the research showed that the sample of teachers (n=82) working in international schools had more expatriate teachers (n=65) than Thai nationals (n=17). This sample represented a mix of nationalities and a mix of various religions. There were more female respondents (n=65) than males (n=17) in the sample of teachers working in international schools. The larger percentage of the sample was in the middle age group of 30-39 years (n=33), followed by the age group of 20-29 years (n=29). So, predominantly most of the sample was below 40 years of age. Also, the sample, consisted of more married teachers (n=45) and the rest were unmarried, divorced or widowed.

The correlation results to test the first hypothesized relationship between person variables and job well-being, found only partial confirmation. Out of the first set of

independent variables- the “person variables”, only the work locus of control (external orientation) has a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.292, p < .01$) with the job related well-being. The other two personality variables have a positive but non-significant correlation with the job well-being, with self-esteem ($r = -.091$) and the teacher self-efficacy ($r = -.087$).

The results for testing the relationship between the perceived situation variables showed statistically significant relationships and hence confirmed the second hypothesis. The results show that the job well-being has statistically significant negative correlations with all of the perceived work situation variables or the perceived work stressors. The correlations of these variables with the job well-being were: with workload ($r = -.224, p < .05$), with interpersonal conflict ($r = -.436, p < .01$), with role conflict ($r = -.382, p < .01$) and with career insecurity ($r = -.507, p < .01$) (shown in Table 1 in Appendix).

Further, t-tests analyses were done and the results showed no significant differences in the job well-being of the demographic groups based on age, gender, nationality and marital status. Hence the hypothesis stating demographic differences was rejected.

The last hypothesis for testing the model of the study was tested using the structural equation modeling techniques by LISREL (v.8). To test the hypothesized structural model for the research, the seven variables were grouped into person and perceived situation variables. Figure 1 represents the structural model for the research with the maximum likelihood standardized parameter estimates.

However, the analysis of goodness of fit of this model (now termed SEM Model 1) did not show an adequate fit, a second model was tested. Further analysis was carried out to

test an alternative structural model for a better fit. This is termed in this research as the SEM analysis for Model 2.

Job well-being is a complex phenomenon, with the person and environment variables having direct and indirect impact on it. To test the structural model 2, the research variables were re-grouped to see their direct and indirect effect on Job well-being. As the initial model did not show significant relationships among variables, the Model 1 was adjusted by splitting the latent variables of person and perceived situation. Job well-being still remained the “endogenous” variable and there were five latent variables- work locus of control, teacher self-efficacy, self-esteem (all three indicators of person variables were taken as independent latent variables), workload and perceived situation (now having three indicators- interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors). The variable of workload has been taken out from the group of indicators of the latent variable of “perceived situation variable” since it had the lowest load factor among all the 4 indicators.

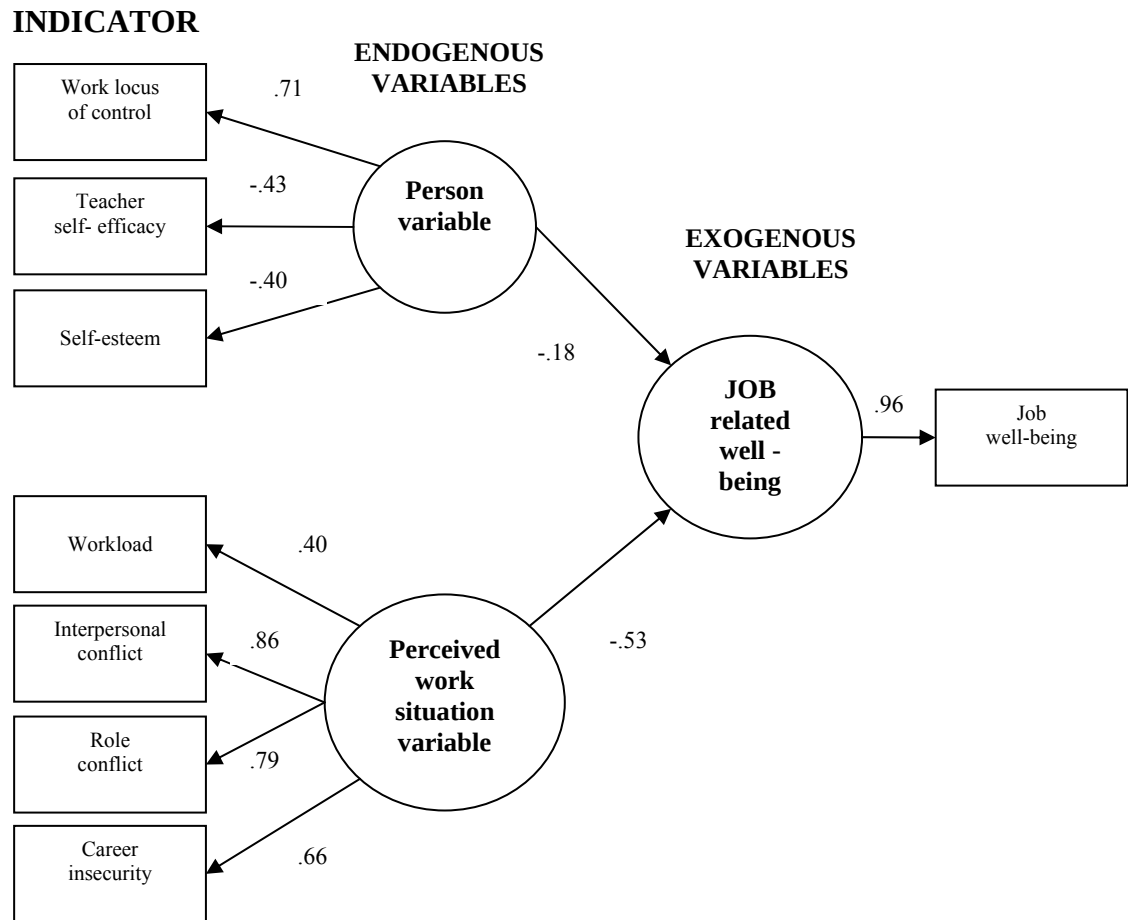


Figure 1. Path Model for the SEM analysis 1.

Taylor and Aspinwall (1996), reviewed the mediating and moderating processes of psychosocial stress and mentioned that “personal resources” influence the nature of stress and also the appraisal of stress. Hence the person variables were taken separately to see their direct effect on the perception of stress related to the “perceived situation” and indirect effect on job well-being. The Table 2 shows the results of SEM analysis for Model 2. It indicates that the perception of stress from work situation does have a negative and significant direct effect on job well-being. Interpersonal conflict, role stress, and

career insecurity factors were the indicators having significant effect on perceived situation variable. The variable of work locus of control had a significant direct effect on the perceived situational stress at the work place. It also has a significant indirect effect on job well-being. The path model for the second stage of the SEM analysis using the LISREL is presented in Figure 2.

Table 2

Maximum Likelihood Parameter Estimates for Path Model 2 of Job Well-Being

Parameter	Unstandardized parameter estimate	SE	Standardized parameter estimate
Work specific locus of control→ Work sitn	0.10 *	0.04	0.33
Self esteem→ Work sitn	0.03	0.11	0.04
Teacher self efficacy→ Work sitn	-0.01	0.15	-0.01
Workload→ Work sitn	0.27*	0.12	0.30
Work situation → Job well-being	-3.34*	0.69	-0.57
Work situation→ Interpersonal conflict	1.00		0.86
Work situation→ Role conflict	0.90*	0.13	0.79
Work situation→ Career insecurity	1.00*	0.16	0.67

Note. Work sitn = latent variable of perceived work situation.

* indicates that estimates are significant at .05 level.

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The SEM goodness-of-fit tests for both model 1 and 2 were carried out to determine if the pattern of variances and covariances in the data is consistent with a hypothesized structural path model. There are many fit indices and the research models were tested using the six indices as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1993).

The comparison of the study's models for the structural model fit indices is shown in Table 3. Also shown are the index fit criteria. The structural model fit indices of the second model of the study showed a reasonable "fit" with values of chi-square=18.46 ($p=0.19$, $df=14$), GFI=0.95, CFI=0.98, RMR=0.05 and RMSEA=0.057.

The model 2 of the study showed that both the person and situation variables affect the job well-being, but in different ways. In the current research, the model 2 indicated that while "perceived situation variable" has *direct effect* on job well being, out of the person variables only work locus of control had a significant but *indirect effect* on job well-being.

Discussion

The results of the study showed some interesting relationships among the study variables. It was found that the internal work locus of control has a statistically significant positive relationship with job well-being. The results of the current study support the view that internal characteristics of an individual tend to dictate how they will react to stressful events (Fimian, 1982), and work locus of control is one such important characteristic. For instance, as researched by Anderson (1977), people with an internal locus of control report higher job satisfaction and can cope better with higher levels of job stress than externals.

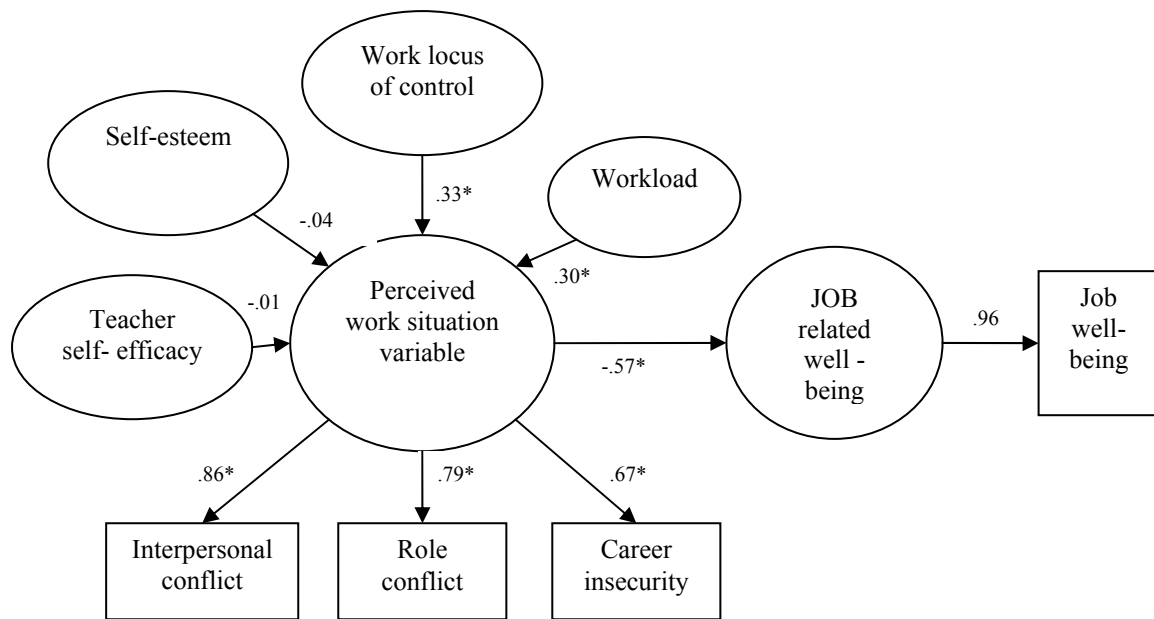


Figure 2. Path Model for the SEM analysis 2 of research showing Maximum Likelihood Standardized Parameter Estimates.

Table 3

Goodness-of-Fit Indices for Both Models.

Model	χ^2	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	GFI	NNFI
Index fit criteria	Non-significant	.05-.08	<.05	>.90	>.90	>.90
Study model 1	$\chi^2(18)=33.46$, p=.015	.10	.087	.92	.91	.87
Study model 2	$\chi^2(14)=18.46$, p=.19	.057	.05	.98	.95	.96

The current research also shows that the work locus of control influences the perceptions of work related stress. Taylor and Aspinwall (1996), in a review on the mediating and moderating processes of psychosocial stress have also mentioned that “personal resources” influence the nature of

stress and also the appraisal of stress. In a specific case of teaching, researchers have found that teachers having an external locus of control experienced greater stress than those with an internal locus of control (Byrne, 1992; Farber, 1991).

The study investigated the variables of workload, interpersonal conflict, role stress, and career insecurity factors as the perceived situational variables (the stressors) affecting the teachers working in international schools. The results found strong correlations among these "perceived stressors" and job well-being, finding support in the other investigations such as done by Pelsma and Richard (1988), who found that job satisfaction and teacher stress to be strongly correlated.

The lack of any significant effect of demographic variables finds support in other researches too. Diener et al. (1999), in their review of subjective well-being over three decades, have mentioned that researchers are often disappointed by small effect sizes for demographic variables. Campbell, Converse, and Rodgers (1976) found that demographic factors (e.g., age, sex, income, race and marital status) accounted for less than 20% of variance in the subjective well-being.

The results testing the proposed structural relationships among the study variables did not find a good fit. This led to the re-adjustment of the research model. The model 2 of the study showed that both the person and situation variables affect the job well-being, but in different ways. The SEM analysis showed that while "perceived situation variable" has *direct effect* on job well being, out of the person variables only work locus of control had a significant but *indirect effect* on job well-being. Buunk et al. (1998) corroborate the research results by stating that the subjective environment is a part of the worker's perception, which Lewin (1951) had termed as the

“psychological environment”. Further, these variables are called “stressors” and lead to stress reactions and strain.

From the point of view of an applied behavioural scientist the results of the study contribute to the knowledge such that:

1. It must be recognized that teachers are the most valuable assets of a school and their well-being is among the critical factors for the effective functioning of both the teacher and the school.
2. International schools have a challenging environment and selecting as well as retaining good teachers is imperative to the functioning of the schools. So schools must examine the factors that promote teacher’s well-being.
3. School managements must recognize that there is a significant interaction between the school environment and the teachers’ personality that results in the feelings of job well-being.
4. Managements of international schools need to comprehend that these schools have a very special environment and the task of teachers working there is complicated by the multi cultural differences in teachers and students.

As some useful evidence has emerged from the study, it is important to mention certain limitations of the study. To have a better understanding of job well being, other behavioural and physical measures may also be collected. The current research is based on self-reports, thus exposing the findings to interpretation of method variance. Another aspect is that the present sample was limited in its size due to unavailability of response from the schools that had been approached by the researcher.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that though the results of the present research did not support the hypothesized framework, they indicated an interesting interaction between the person and situation variables on the work outcome of job well-being of teachers in international schools. The results of the current study reveal that internal characteristics of an individual tend to dictate how they will react to stressful events, and work locus of control is one such important characteristic. This information can be of importance to the applied behavioral scientist in order to develop some strategies to elevate the job well-being of teachers using “self” as the tool for empowering teachers.

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Appendix

Table 1
Matrix of Correlation Coefficients of the Study Variables (N=82)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Work locus of control												
2. Self esteem	-.193*											
3. Teacher self-efficacy	-.294**	.332**										
4. Workload	.256**	-.217*	.124									
5. Interpersonal conflict	.287**	-.112	-.035	.332**								
6. Role stress	.237**	-.024	-.112	.274**	.698**							
7. Career security	.260**	-.022	.106	.388**	.564**	.491**						
8. Age	.019	.194	-.032	.103	.096	.132	.125					
9. Gender	-.235*	-.034	-.189	-.095	.022	.133	-.164	.028				
10. Marital status	.225*	.219	.017	-.059	-.014	.116	.075	.576**	-.214			
11. Nationality	-.384**	.007	.311**	.095	-.051	-.042	-.112	.039	.039	-.041		
12. Job well being	-.292**	.091	.087	-.224*	-.436**	-.382**	-.507**	-.223*	-.086	-.093	-.122	

* $p < .05$, Significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

** $p < .01$, Significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

(Please note that the work locus of control measures an "external orientation")