

Title

Explaining Teacher Attrition at Secondary School Level

Abstract

Teacher attrition has been a worldwide problem for decades. Research and interventions on the government (macro) and individual (micro) level did not lead to the desired improvements. The school (meso) level is worth further investigating, being the level that directly influences the individual and can be influenced by school administrations. In a systematic review study, factors at school level, dispositional variables and demographic characteristics related to teacher attrition at secondary school level were identified. Leadership, student discipline and collaboration with colleagues were the most important factors at school level; teacher efficacy, work pressure and autonomy were important dispositional variables; and years of experience, teaching/school level and school size stood out as important demographic characteristics. In order to validate the constructed conceptual model, systematic and empirical research is needed. In the current study, we develop and validate a questionnaire that cover the findings of the review study. Secondary teachers of approximately 25 schools in the Netherlands will complete the questionnaire, resulting in generated data to empirically validate the conceptual model. These insights provide input for the upcoming design of a practical instrument that can be used to predict or prevent teacher attrition.

Extended summary*Theoretical background and research question*

Teacher attrition has been a worldwide problem for several decades (Schleicher, 2012). Teacher attrition has been extensively studied at macro level by quantifying typical (national) attrition rates (Ingersoll, 2001). These studies often made recommendations from the macro perspective; for example salaries, benefits, or working conditions in general (Swanson & Mason, 2018). By deriving conclusions from teacher demographics in combination with attrition rates, the micro level (teachers' level) has also been addressed, identifying attrition differences as a consequence of gender (Stinebrickner, 1998), age (Kelly, 2004), or years of experience (You & Conley, 2015). The *meso* or school level covers factors in the teacher workplace, such as collegiality, administrative support, interaction with students and parents, school climate, etc. (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). This meso level is often left underexposed, or only marginally addressed (Buchanan, 2012; Glazer, 2018), but it is precisely this school level that needs more attention as it is an important influencer of the micro level and it is the school that bears the burden when teachers give up their job (Schleicher, 2012).

Therefore, a systematic review has been carried out to select factors, variables and demographics at the secondary school level related to teacher attrition, resulting in a conceptual model (De Jong-Kroon et al., 2022). This model displays the most important factors at school level (leadership, student discipline, collaboration with colleagues), dispositional variables (teacher efficacy, work pressure, autonomy) and teacher demographics (years of experience, teacher/school level, school size). Because these findings included data from countries all over the world, it is important to validate these findings for the situation in the Netherlands. The current study aims to empirically validate these findings in practice in the Netherlands, by developing a questionnaire in which these factors at school level, dispositional variables and demographic characteristics are covered. Teachers from approximately 25 Dutch schools are asked to complete this questionnaire in May 2022. The research question for this study is: *To what extent does the conceptual model explain the intention to leave the job in secondary education in the Netherlands?*

Research design

Based on the review study, that led to underlying concepts such as Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (2000) that explains the satisfaction of Basic Psychological Needs at work and the Reasoned Action Approach of Fishbein and Ajzen (2015) which explains the intent of behaviour

(like teacher attrition), scales and questions were selected. Teachers from approximately 25 different schools in different areas in the Netherlands are asked to complete this questionnaire in May 2022. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) will be used to analyse the data (multilevel variance analyses), with *intention to leave* as latent variable and the selected factors at school level, dispositional variables and demographic characteristics as observed variables.

Contribution to the educational practice

This quantitative study will contribute to the empirical validation of the conceptual model for the situation of secondary school teachers in the Netherlands. However, for a sound conceptual model also the usability and relevance is important. Therefore a discussion with other experts in the field (researchers and practitioners) is important to validate the model more thoroughly and make it suitable as a basis for the development of practical instruments that can be used in educational practice. During the roundtable session at EAPRIL 2022 the findings from the study will be discussed. Participants will be asked to reflect on the factors, characteristics and demographics found to be most decisive for teacher attrition in the Netherlands. During the session participants will at first be encouraged to share their own experiences and ideas related to these findings. The different nationalities of the participants will provide added value in this discussion, as the second goal of this session is to share ideas about the approach in educational practice of these teacher attrition challenges, caused by these underlying factors, characteristics and demographics. The experiences as well as the approaches will provide valuable input for the continuation of the study where we will develop a practical instrument that can be used to predict or prevent teacher attrition.

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