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Optimization of University Department Management: The Increase of Foreign Language Teachers' Self-Efficacy by Preventing Job Burnout

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Abstract

The paper aims to present theoretical and empirical research on investigating the optimization of university department management by preventing job burnout in university teaching staff which resulted in increasing their self-efficacy. The research sample was selected with the use of a non-random sampling technique. All foreign languages teachers invited agreed to take part in the study. To collect the empirical data from 205 foreign languages teachers a mixed methods approach was applied. The quantitative data were collected using the questionnaire on general self-efficacy created by R. Schwarzer and M. Jerusalem (1995) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (1996). The qualitative methods included observations and interviews. The obtained data were then analysed by means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS software). The authors theoretically substantiated and practically demonstrated the efficiency of the proposed programme aimed at optimizing university department management by preventing job burnout in foreign language teachers.

Key words: *university department management; self-efficacy; job burnout; foreign language teachers*

Introduction

University departments play a key role in providing high quality education of competitive experts who enter the global labour market. The more efficient the department's teaching staff the better students are equipped to deal with complex professional issues when they graduate from higher educational institutions and start working. The efficiency of any university department is dependent on both the efficiency of every individual department member and on the efficiency of the department's teaching staff. But why do some university teachers demonstrate a high level of self-efficacy? What is the cause of university teachers' low self-efficacy? What limits the professional and personal potential of university teachers? In what way is the university teachers' low self-efficacy reflected in the competitiveness of the department? The answers to these questions may shed light on problems concerning the optimization of university department management and the role of the university department head in this process.

In their everyday activities university department heads have to take managerial decisions which influence the establishment of a sound work flow. In this regard the managerial abilities of the university department head to quickly respond to problems which affect indicators for teaching staff performance, as well as performance of every individual teacher, become key in the competitiveness of the university department.

The efficiency of university departments depends on the level of teacher self-efficacy. University teachers whose self-efficacy is very high are ready to improve their on-the-job skills, gain new experience and share it with their colleagues. What is more, they are not afraid of any challenges, are more committed to teaching, and report greater job satisfaction (OECD, 2014, p. 22). We agree with Cherry (2018) in thinking that people with a strong sense of self-efficacy consider challenging issues as tasks to be mastered, take a greater interest in the activities they participate in, and build a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities. Unlike people with a strong sense of self-efficacy, people whose sense of self-efficacy is weak believe that difficult tasks are beyond their capabilities, focus more on personal failings and negative outcomes, and quickly lose confidence in personal abilities (Cherry, 2018).

In this regard, the problem concerning the optimization of university department management through the increase in the general self-efficacy of teaching staff is of particular interest in our research.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

The main objective of this study is to present theoretical and empirical research investigating the optimization of university department management by preventing job burnout in university teaching staff which resulted in increasing their self-efficacy. The main objective was achieved by accomplishing the sequence of the following sub-objectives:

- to confirm the correlation between the foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and job burnout;
- to develop a programme aimed at optimizing university department management by preventing job burnout in foreign language teachers;
- to summarize the findings of the research in investigation into optimization of university department management.

The study was carried out in the 2017/2019 academic years among the foreign language teachers of seven Ukrainian higher educational institutions.

Research Sample

Foreign language teachers from seven Ukrainian universities, namely, National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (52 teachers), National Technical University of Ukraine "Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute" (46 teachers), Ivan Franko National University of Lviv (12), National Aviation University (28 teachers), Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University (19 teachers), Donetsk National University of Economics and Trade (10 teachers), and Taras Shevchenko State University (37 teachers) were selected to take part in the study. The research sample was selected with the use of a non-random sampling technique, based on the fact that all respondents were foreign language teachers working at state universities. In total 205 foreign languages teachers were a part of this research, 101 foreign languages teachers in the experimental group and 104 foreign languages teachers in the control group.

The demographic distribution of the collected data (the experimental group) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample demographics (the experimental group)

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	7%
Female	93%
Age	
<=30	10%
31-40	34%
41-50	36%
>=51	20%
41-50	36%
>=51	20%
Scientific title	
Full Professor	9%
Assistant Professor	31%
Position	
Professor	9%
Assistant Professor	42%
Senior teacher	27%
Teacher	22%

The demographic distribution of the collected data (the control group) is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Sample demographics (the control group)

Variable	Percentage
Gender	
Male	8%
Female	92%
Age	
<=30	
31-40	12%
41-50	32%
>=51	33%
41-50	23%
>=51	
Scientific title	
Full Professor	7%
Assistant Professor	27%
Position	
Professor	7%
Assistant Professor	40%
Senior teacher	28%
Teacher	25%

Although the positions and roles of all respondents in the experimental and control groups usually imply different patterns of work, we have to note that all respondents were not the members of graduate departments. This means they taught mostly foreign languages for specific purposes to students of different faculties and their teaching load comprised hours required for classroom instruction. Besides this, professors and assistant professors were involved in both organizing and participating in domestic and international conferences, seminars and workshops, whereas senior teachers and teachers were involved only in participating in such events.

Instrument and Procedures

Qualitative methods

The qualitative methods included observations of participants and interviews with them aimed at understanding the reasons for low level of general self-efficacy demonstrated by foreign language teachers. Like the quantitative methods, the qualitative ones made a great contribution to understanding the correlation between respondents' general self-efficacy and job burnout and developing a programme aimed at optimizing the management of the foreign language departments.

Quantitative methods

The quantitative data were collected using the questionnaire on general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). The assessment of foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy was done using the questionnaire on general self-efficacy created by R. Schwarzer and M. Jerusalem (1995). All the respondents were asked to rate statements according to a 4-point scale (not at all true – 1 point, hardly true – 2 points, moderately true – 3 points and exactly true – 4 points). In order to get a summary score the responses supplied by the foreign language teachers were added up. Findings ranging from 10 to 26 points were taken to show a low level of general self-efficacy, from 27 to 35 points – a medium level of general self-efficacy and from 36 and higher – a high level of general self-efficacy.

For assessing the various aspects of foreign language teachers' job burnout the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996) was used. To understand if the respondents' self-efficacy correlates with job burnout the same respondents were asked to assess 22 statements about their personal feelings and attitudes in terms of the frequency with which they experience them. The design of the MBI enabled three components of job burnout to be assessed, namely,

emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. Job burnout was evaluated by a Likert-type frequency scale ranging from 0 to 6 (0 – never, 1 – sometimes in a year, 2 – once a month or less, 3 – sometimes during the month, 4 – once a week, 5 – sometimes during the week, 6 – every day).

Each questionnaire was conducted in the presence of researchers and all respondents were guaranteed total anonymity.

Procedures

Two months prior to the introduction of the proposed programme aimed at optimizing university department management, a team of three researchers interviewed 205 foreign languages teachers from seven Ukrainian universities to understand the complexities of teaching experiences from their points of view and reasons for the lowering of their general self-efficacy. A team of researchers also observed how the selected respondents worked together: performed their professional activities connected with teaching, managed collaboration, or conflict in the workplace, were ready to help colleagues, were able to organize special events and connect with colleagues from different departments and universities etc. Then, all respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire on general self-efficacy (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996).

After the initial assessment of foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and job burnout experimental and control groups were formed and the work aimed at optimizing the foreign language department management started. Such work was provided for 101 foreign language teachers (the experimental group). The 104 foreign language teachers who represented the control group continued working as usual. The programme aimed at optimizing the foreign language department management by preventing job burnout included: the creation of professional learning networks within the selected departments; giving assignments connected with the organization of conferences, round-table discussions, seminars, workshops and department presentations to mini-groups of teachers with different levels of organizational and communicative skills; running various training sessions and refresher courses on the development of foreign language teachers' resilience in the face of professional problems.

Thus, the first measure concerning prevention of job burnout was connected with the creation of professional learning networks. According to Rheingold, a professional learning network is a group of people linked by their participation in computer networks (Rheingold, 1993). Trust, Krutka and Carpenter (2016) believe that professional learning networks are “uniquely personalized, complex

systems of interactions consisting of people, resources, and digital tools that support ongoing learning and professional growth” (p. 35). As a source of collegial support, emotional engagement and reflection, sharing and filtering new ideas (Lantz-Anderson, Lundin & Selwynal, 2018), professional learning networks provide continuing professional development for their members. Our practical experience shows that participating in professional learning networks, foreign language teachers become more confident in handling different tasks. This happens because facing mutual challenges in the working place, members of professional learning networks try to find a common solution and accept common responsibility for its success or failure. Communication of the department teaching staff via Viber and Facebook Messenger enabled them to share different teaching materials, to be informed about important events, to discuss some acute problems and not to be afraid of voicing their opinions.

The second measure preventing job burnout involved giving assignments connected with the organization of conferences, round-table discussions, seminars, workshops and department presentations to mini-groups of teachers with different levels of organizational and communicative skills. Grouping foreign language teachers with different levels of organizational and communicative skills promotes the development of the sense of involvement and belonging to one community, building trust, reciprocity, patience, open-mindedness, appreciation of differences and mutual help. The use of group assignments in managing the department’s teaching staff ensures mutual assistance and a sense of unity with a definite purpose.

The third measure preventing burnout included running various training sessions and refresher courses on the development of the resilience of foreign language teachers in the face of professional problems. Participation of the department’s teaching staff in training sessions and refresher courses organized by department head provides foreign language teachers with necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes and enables them to perform their professional functions properly in accordance with all the requirements of the higher educational institutions.

To achieve the main aim of the research two hypotheses were formulated:

H 1: The introduction of the proposed programme, aimed at optimizing the foreign language department management by preventing job burnout in day-to-day operation of the departments, considerably influences the increase of foreign language teachers’ general self-efficacy and substantially facilitates the creation of a culture of trust and support among the teaching staff.

H 2: The introduction of the proposed programme aimed at optimizing the foreign language department management by preventing job burnout in day-to-

day operation of the departments has little impact on foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and the creation of a culture of trust and support among the teaching staff.

Results and Discussion

The results of the interviews show that 93% are not satisfied with their workload, mentioning that the necessity to spend significant amounts of time in the workplace does not provide opportunities for personal and professional enrichment and self-discovery. Thus, although according to the new Ukrainian law "On Higher Education" the maximal load intended for regular teaching activity only is 600 hours per academic year (hours intended only for teaching activity), it is hardly possible to assess the total work load of university teachers. This is because, apart from teaching activity, university teachers have to take part in different conferences, seminars, prepare research-based reports, organize round-table discussions with students and colleagues etc.

82% of all respondents are convinced that the salaries they earn is the strongest negative factor in the development of self-efficacy beliefs and the desire to perform their professional functions properly. The small salaries paid to university teachers drive them to seek additional sources of income which results in irritability, fatigue and lack of time.

63% of all respondents admit that they have problems dealing with colleagues. These problems are mostly connected with individual differences between foreign language teachers, their education and work experience and unwillingness to show their incompetence in some issues.

The results of the observations, which included attendance of department heads at open English language classes and foreign language teachers' performance evaluations, demonstrate that the majority of foreign language teachers are rather indifferent and are not interested in students' achievements. Despite having considerable experience, 75% of the foreign language department's teaching staff is not able to solve tasks concerning the organization of different events (round-table discussions, seminars, workshops, conferences etc). Moreover, when faced with a problem they lose self-confidence and self-control which, in turn, results in inability to take a sound decision.

Table 3 shows the rating of job burnout components and self-efficacy levels by foreign language teachers at seven Ukrainian higher educational institutions (N=205).

Table 3. The rating of job burnout components and self-efficacy levels by foreign languages teachers at seven Ukrainian higher educational institutions

Indicators	N	Mini- mum	Maxi- mum	Mean	Std. De- viation	Variance	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	
Emotional exhaustion	205	13	42	27.16	1.431	7.967	63.473
Depersonali- zation	205	5	24	14.06	0.866	4.823	23.262
Reduced professional accomplish- ments	205	9	46	35.74	1.381	7.690	59.131
General self-efficacy	205	23	37	30.61	0.741	4.143	17.455

The obtained results were compared with standard ratings on the Maslach Burnout Inventory for educators. The comparison showed that the susceptibility to burnout was recorded by foreign language teachers at Ukrainian higher educational institutions is higher than the standard indicators for the sub-scales of “Emotional Exhaustion” and “Reduction of Professional Accomplishment” (Mann-Whitney U test, $p < 0.05$); there are no differences for the “Depersonalization” sub-scale.

Correlation analysis shows that foreign language teachers’ self-efficacy negatively correlates with emotional exhaustion ($p < 0.01$) and reduction of professional accomplishment ($p < 0.05$), but shows no correlation with depersonalization (Table 4). In other words, signs of emotional exhaustion (emotional state, irritability, indifference, lack of motivation etc.) and reduction of professional accomplishment are shown in foreign language teachers, who often question their ability to solve various professional problems effectively. Beliefs in self-efficacy, in view of this, can be regarded as an emotional and meaningful resource to resist burnout in professional activity. Thus, we can conclude that foreign language teachers’ beliefs in self-efficacy are connected to signs of job burnout.

Table 4. Correlation between foreign language teachers’ self-efficacy and job burnout components

	Emotional exhaustion	Depersonalization	Reduction of profes- sional accomplishment
Self-efficacy	$r = -0.25, p < 0.01$	$r = -0.11, p > 0.05$	$r = 0.17, p < 0.05^*$

Linear regression analysis was used to find cause-and-effect relationships of job burnout components (dependent variable) from independent variables – self-efficacy indicators presented in the questionnaire’s statements.

The regressive equation of “Emotional Exhaustion” component shown in Table 5 with a multiple coefficient correlation of 0.694 and a determination coefficient of 0.493 is statistically valid. This regressive model explains 49% of the variance of the dependent variable and is relevant according to the Fisher criterion (13.22, $p=0.001$).

The most influential predictors of emotional exhaustion are the following statements, all of which all had a negative contribution “I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough” ($B=-.824$, $p < 0.005$); “I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events” ($B=-.744$, $p < 0.007$); “I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort” ($B=-.640$, $p < 0.021$). While the statement “I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities” ($B=.510$, $p < 0.023$) had a positive contribution. The contribution of these predictors in emotional exhaustion (49% of the distribution, $p < 0.001$) confirms that the insecurity of a person in his/her ability to effectively cope with life and professional problems plays a very important role in determination of emotional exhaustion. That is why the foreign language teachers with a high level of self-efficacy do not tend to experience job burnout (Table 5).

Table 5. The results of the regressive analysis on emotional exhaustion component

	B	Beta	T	Sig. (p<)	Model statistics
(Constant)	45.770		4.353	0.000	
If someone opposes me, I can find means and ways to get what I want	-3.872	-0.371	-1.786	0.049	
I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough	9.765	-0.824	3.193	0.005	R = 0.694 R ² =0.493 (49%)
I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities	4.979	0.510	2.460	0.023	F (13.22) P <0.001
I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort	-8.979	0.640	-2.497	0.021	
I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events	-8.470	-0.744	-3.011	0.007	

The findings show a close cause-and-effect relationship between the high level of foreign language teachers’ job burnout and lowering of the level of self-efficacy. Table 6 demonstrates the results obtained among the respondents in the experimental and control groups, before and after the experimental work aimed at optimizing the foreign language department management.

Table 6. The results obtained among the respondents in the experimental and control groups before and after implementation of the developed programme

Sub-scale	Group	The low level of self-efficacy (%)		The medium level of self-efficacy (%)		The high level of self-efficacy (%)	
		Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Emotional exhaustion	Experimental	48*	30*	37	48	15	22
	Control	46	44	39	38	15	18
Depersonalization	Experimental	46	50	43	44	11	6
	Control	40	39	44	46	16	15
Reduced personal accomplishment	Experimental	25	29	57*	40*	18	31
	Control	30	34	50	45	20	21

Note:

* – statistically significant changes after the developed programme implementation

The obtained results enable it to be stated that there were no significant changes in the control group before and after the experimental work aimed at optimizing foreign language department management. In the experimental group considerable changes were identified on such sub-scales as “Emotional exhaustion” and “Reduced personal accomplishments”. We have to note that after implementation of the developed programme the level of emotional exhaustion among the experimental group respondents who demonstrated the low level of self-efficacy was reduced from 48% to 30 % (significant at $p < 0.05$). The level of reduced personal accomplishment among the experimental group respondents who had a medium level of self-efficacy was reduced from 57% to 40% (significant at $p < 0.05$); levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment declined among 13% of the experimental group respondents with high level of self-efficacy (statistically insignificant results which can be regarded as a tendency). On the “Depersonalization” sub-scale however, no significant changes were identified. Thus, the first hypothesis, which was an assumption that the optimization of foreign language department management by preventing job burnout in day-to-day operation of the departments would considerably influence the increase of foreign

language teacher general self-efficacy and substantially facilitate the creation of a culture of trust and support among teaching staff was confirmed. The second hypothesis, which was an assumption that the optimization of the foreign language department management by preventing job burnout in day-to-day operations of the departments would have little impact on foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and the creation of a culture of trust and support among teaching staff, was rejected.

Conclusions

The main objective of the study which was to present theoretical and empirical research on investigating the optimization of university department management by preventing job burnout in university teaching staff resulted in increasing their self-efficacy. The main objective was achieved by developing a programme aimed at optimizing university department management by preventing job burnout in foreign language teachers; confirming the correlation between the foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and job burnout and summarizing the findings of the research in investigation into optimization of university department management.

The obtained findings showed that the optimization of foreign language department management by preventing job burnout in day-to-day operations of the departments resulted in the increase of foreign language teachers' general self-efficacy and creation of a culture of trust and support among the department teaching staff.

While researchers investigating the problem of optimizing university department management by preventing job burnout can take into consideration the implications of the present study, further research is recommended in this area.

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