The importance of a supportive workplace and engaged students for ESL instructors’ teaching motivation

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Following the theoretical model of Pelletier et al., (2002), the present research examined English as a second language (ESL) instructors’ engagement in teaching as well as a variety of hypothesized antecedents of engagement, including the teachers’ autonomous or controlled motivational orientation, and more distally, their perceptions of their students’ intensity of engagement and their perceptions of workplace pressure, informative feedback, and relatedness. Practicing teachers from a provincial ESL organization (N = 221) completed an online questionnaire. Structural equation modeling assessed whether teacher’s perceptions students’ engagement and their perceptions of support in the workplace, on the one hand, and their teaching engagement, on the other hand, were mediated by the teachers’ own motivational orientation for teaching. Consistent with the proposed model, a more self-determined orientation for teaching was associated with greater absorption, dedication and energy in teaching and greater intention to continue with this career. A more controlled motivational orientation and amotivation for teaching were unrelated to engagement in teaching and greater intention to quit the job. The teachers’ motivational orientation for teaching was predicted by the perception of their supervisor as warm and supportive of the teacher’s autonomy and with the perception of students as engaged. A more controlled motivational orientation to teaching was associated with the perception of the supervisor as controlling and of the students as disengaged. Finally, amotivation was associated with the perception of students as disengaged. The results are discussed in light of their implications for teaching practice and support, and particularly the apparently reciprocal relation between students’ and teachers’ motivation.


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