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## The Effects of Early Childhood Teachers' Resilience and Empowerment on Their Job Satisfaction

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the relations of early childhood teachers' resilience, empowerment, and job satisfaction, and to investigate the effects of resilience and empowerment on their job satisfaction. The research subjects were 419 early childhood teachers in charge of 3-5 year olds in kindergartens or daycare centers located in South Korea. The collected data were analyzed using the SPSS 28.0 Program. We calculated the Cronbach's alphas and conducted the descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis. The results showed the statistically positive correlations between the major variable. The positive effects of early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment on their job satisfaction were also found. In the relative influence on job satisfaction, the empowerment was greater than resilience. Based on the study results, we suggest academic and practical importance of early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment, which enables them dedicate on excellent teaching and caring young children via satisfaction with work settings.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Teachers, Job Satisfaction, Resilience, Empowerment Introduction

## 1. INTRODUCTION

South Korea has recently shifted to the society with a high rate of double-income households and a low birth rate. In order to increase and support the birth rates, Korean government has struggled to strengthen social systems such as the quality child care and education [1].

One of the important variables for quality child care and education is early childhood teachers' job satisfaction. According to previous research results, early childhood teachers' high evaluation on their job satisfaction is closely related to their role performance capability and organizational commitment [2, 3]. Specifically, teachers with high level of job satisfaction show excellent level of teaching expertise [4] and teacher-child interactions [5]. The research on early childhood teachers' job satisfaction is needed so that teachers stay engaged and committed in their teaching, particularly under present situation with a low birth rate.

One of the variables that are related early childhood teachers' job satisfaction is resilience. Kim defines resilience as the ability to cope with adversity and to use it as a springboard for recovery [6]. A resilient teacher would be someone who has strong coping skills and is able to utilize their available resources, ask for help

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when needed, and find solutions to manage the situation they are facing [7]. Several researchers have suggested that early childhood teachers' resilience has positive relations with their job satisfaction [8-10]. Others have also suggested that early childhood teachers' resilience has positive effect on their job satisfaction [11-13].

The other variable we give attention is early childhood teachers' empowerment. Koo and You defined empowerment as state of being empowered to do something as a member of organization [14]. Many educational professionals including early childhood education place heavy emphasis on the importance of being empowered. Being empowered is an individual's psychological process that enhance one's own innate job motivation based on self-reassurance [15]. It seems that through empowerment early childhood teacher would have enough resources and freedom to provide every young children with the education that they deserve. Prior research results have reported the positive correlations between early childhood teachers' empowerment and their job satisfactions [16, 17]. The effects of early childhood teachers' empowerment on their job satisfaction have also been reported [18-20].

Previous scholars have found that both resilience and empowerment of early childhood teachers influence their job satisfaction. However, there has been little research into how these variables are simultaneously associated with. Therefore, it seems necessary to investigate how both resilience and empowerment affect early childhood teachers' job satisfaction together. In the present study, we explore the relative effects of resilience and empowerment on job satisfaction. For the purpose of the study, we set two research questions.

Research Question 1. What are the correlations of early childhood teachers' resilience, empowerment, and job satisfaction?

Research Question 2. What are the effects of early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment on their job satisfaction?

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

### 2.1 Subjects

The subjects were 419 early childhood teachers in South Korea. We used a simple random sampling technique to include the subjects. Their background information are as follows. 97.2% ( $n = 407$ ) were females and 2.9% ( $n = 12$ ) were males. In terms of the ages, 7.4% ( $n = 31$ ) were under 25, 37.7% ( $n = 158$ ) were 26-30 years old, 26.5% ( $n = 111$ ) were 31-35 years old, 16.5% ( $n = 69$ ) were 36-40 years old, and 11.9% ( $n = 50$ ) were over 41 years old. As for the educational levels, 1.7% ( $n = 7$ ) graduated from high school or training centers, 36.3% ( $n = 153$ ) graduated from a 2-3 year college, 53.2% ( $n = 223$ ), graduated from a 4 year college, and 8.8% ( $n = 37$ ) graduated from graduate schools. 44.4% ( $n = 186$ ) worked at kindergartens and 55.7% ( $n = 233$ ) worked at day care centers as room teachers for 3-5 years olds. In teaching experiences as early childhood teachers, 1.2% ( $n = 5$ ) worked for under 1 years, 13.4% ( $n = 56$ ) worked for 1-2 years, 26.7% ( $n = 112$ ) worked for 3~4 years, 34.8% ( $n = 146$ ) worked for 5~9 years, 15.36% ( $n = 64$ ) worked for 10~14 years, and 8.6% ( $n = 36$ ) worked over 15 years.

### 2.2 Measures

**Job Satisfaction.** We used a 27-item scale developed by O and Yoon [21]. The scale consists of seven sub-scales: Professionalism (3 items), autonomy (3 items), director-colleague relationship (4 items), parental relationship (5 items), child relationship (5 items), work environment (4 items), and social recognition (3 items). A sample item is "I try to learn new information and skills to improve my professionalism." All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). Cronbach's alphas were .77 for professionalism, .76 for autonomy, .83 for director-colleague relationship, .89 for parental relationship, .87 for child relationship, .89 for work environment, .79 for social recognition, and .94 for the total.

**Resilience.** We used a 53-item Korean Resilience Quotient-53 (KRQ-53) scale developed by Kim [6]. The scale consists of three sub-scales: Self-regulation (18 items), interpersonal competency (18 items), and positive attitude (17 items). A sample item is "I am sure everything will work out even in the face of a difficult situation." All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). Cronbach's alphas were .86 for self-regulation, .89 for interpersonal competency, .89 for positive attitude, and .95 for the total.

**Empowerment.** We used a 37-item scale developed by Kim [22]. The scale consists of six sub-scales: Decision making (9 items), professional growth (6 items), status (6 items), self-efficacy (6 items), autonomy (4 items), and impact (6 items). A sample item is "I have an opportunity for training and education to enhance my professionalism in the field of work." All items were scored on a 5-point Likert scale that ranged from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 5 (*totally agree*). Cronbach's alphas were .89 for decision making, .88 for professional growth, .91 for status, .87 for self-efficacy, .80 for autonomy, .90 for impact, and .96 for the total.

### 2.3 Statistical Approach

Statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS version 28.0. Four hundred nineteen cases with complete data on all three measures were included in the analysis. We calculated the mean and standard deviations for continuous variables and frequencies and percentages for categorical variables. Cronbach's alphas were calculated to verify the reliabilities of measures. In order to verify the research questions, we conducted the descriptive statistical analysis, Pearson's correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

## 3. RESULTS

We conducted the data screening such as the missing values and normality checks before data analysis. As shown in Table 1, since the skewness values varied from -.44 to .21 and the kurtosis values from -.51 to .36, we assumed the normality of data. The subjects showed a moderate level of resilience ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .46$ ), empowerment ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = .59$ ), and job satisfaction ( $M = 3.79$ ,  $SD = .57$ ).

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations between major variables ( $N = 419$ )**

Variables	①	②	③
① Resilience			
② Empowerment	.70**	-	
③ Job Satisfaction	.70**	.79**	-
$M(SD)$	3.79 (.46)	3.80 (.59)	3.79 (.57)
Skewness	-.30	.21	-.44
Kurtoses	.05	-.51	.36

\*\* $p < .01$

For the first research question, we conducted Pearson's correlation analysis. As shown in Table 1, early childhood teachers' job satisfaction had a statistically significant positive correlation with resilience ( $r = .70$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and with empowerment ( $r = .70$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Early Childhood Teachers' empowerment also showed a statistically significant positive correlation with job satisfaction ( $r = .79$ ,  $p < .01$ ). These results support findings of the previous studies that impose a positive correlations of job satisfaction with resilience and empowerment [8-13].

For the second research question, we conducted the analysis of multiple regressions with job satisfaction as

the dependent variable along with resilience and empowerment as independent variables. Since *VIFs* (1.06~1.97) were within acceptable limits, we assumed that multicollinearity was not an issue. As shown in Table 2, the multiple regression model with the predictors of resilience and empowerment produced the following results:  $F = 414.63$ ,  $p < .001$ . In addition, resilience ( $t = 7.46$ ,  $\beta = .30$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and empowerment ( $t = 14.55$ ,  $\beta = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in the regression model positively affected job satisfaction. Together, the independent variables accounted for 66.4% ( $Adj. R^2 = .66$ ) of the variance of job satisfaction. In the relative influence on job satisfaction, the empowerment was greater than resilience.

**Table 2. Effects resilience and empowerment on job satisfaction (N = 419)**

Variables	Job Satisfaction			
	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
(Constant)	.27	.24		2.24 <sup>*</sup>
Resilience	.11	.05	.30	7.46 <sup>***</sup>
Empowerment	.62	.07	.58	14.55 <sup>***</sup>

$F = 414.63^{***}$  ( $F^2 = .67$ ,  $Adj. F^2 = .66$ )

<sup>\*</sup> $p < .05$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup> $p < .001$

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has two folds. One is to examine the correlations between early childhood teachers' resilience, empowerment, and job satisfaction. The other is to verify the effect of early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment on their job satisfaction. For the purpose of the study, self-report survey questionnaires were done with 419 early childhood teachers as subjects. The results show that early childhood teachers with higher level of resilience and empowerment have a higher level in job satisfaction. Early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment, moreover, are verified as the predictor variables for job satisfaction. Even though empowerment shows the more effects than resilience on job satisfaction, they both have statistically significant positive effects. Based on the study results, we suggest academic and practical importance of early childhood teachers' resilience and empowerment, which enables them dedicate on excellent teaching and caring young children via satisfaction with work settings.

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