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Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English schools

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Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English Schools

A named professional with responsibility for overseeing and coordinating the educational inclusion of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities has become an important school role in many countries. In England, the SENCO (special educational needs coordinator) became a mandatory role in 1994, and associated mandatory training was introduced in 2009. A questionnaire survey of 618 in-training and actual SENCOs revealed that their motivating interest in becoming a SENCO varied. An exploratory factor analysis of 32 items covering different interests in the role yielded four interest factors in becoming a SENCO – outward facing factors ('inclusion' and 'high quality provision') and inward facing factors ('educational and professional development' and 'leadership voice and status'). The outward facing factors were viewed as more important to respondents than the inward facing factors. Interest factors did not interact with organisational variables including age group taught and school quality. Nevertheless, younger SENCOs and those engaged in training were more motivated by educational and professional development. SENCOs holding school leadership contracts were more motivated in developing leadership voice and status compared with their classroom teacher peers. Moreover, there was a significant overall difference with women reporting a higher interest than men across all factors.

Keywords: SENCO, career interest, factor analysis, inclusion, special educational needs, disability

Introduction

In English law, special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) are key personnel in developing school provision for children with special educational needs (SEN) (NCTL, 2014). The position is similar to other roles in countries where inclusion is supported through schools operating internal mechanisms of support (Poon-McBrayer, 2012), i.e. special educators supporting the practice of others within the same setting. This type of support is particularly prevalent across many nation states within Europe (European Commission, 2013). These countries include Sweden (Klang, Gustafson, Möllås, Nilholm, & Göransson, 2017; Göransson, Lindqvist, Möllås, & Nilholm, 2017), Ireland (Kearns, 2005; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017), Greece (Agaliotis & Efrosini, 2011) and Finland (Sundqvist & Ström, 2015). This model of support also exists outside Europe, e.g. Hong Kong (Poon-McBrayer, 2012). In England, regulations stipulate that the SENCO must be a qualified teacher who has completed their induction. If they were appointed after 2009, they must undertake an additional masters-level programme called the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCo). The role of the SENCO outlined in the most recent English guidance offers 11 suggested duties, including advising others and overseeing SEN policy (DfE/DOH, 2015, p. 109). These are in addition to having "an important role to play with the headteacher and governing body, in determining the strategic development of SEN policy and provision in the school" (DfE/DOH, 2015, p. 108).

Most research on SENCOs has been conducted at the level of the organisation or school rather than that of the person. Consequently, most of the literature has focused on how school decision making has resulted in varied SENCO provision (Pearson, Mitchell & Rapti, 2015). Specific examples of research focus include: the continuing debate on whether the role is deemed to have enough status to be a leadership role (Tissot, 2013; Curran, 2019); the need for SENCOs to provide a voice for inclusion (Cole, 2005; Fisher, 2012); whether SENCOs should be involved in strategic school development, including the development of others (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Done, Murphy & Watt, 2016; Qureshi, 2014); and the evaluation of SENCO professional training (Brown & Doveston, 2014; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012). This growing body of work adds to the understanding of a role which is regarded as being increasingly self-reliant and an important advocate for children with SEN (Pearson et al., 2015).

What is missing from most of this research is a deeper understanding of the person (SENCO), their needs and interests, and the compatibility of these with those of the organisation (school). Kristof (1996) describes this compatibility of the person and the organisation that employs them as the person-organisation (P-O) fit. Chatman (1989) argues that all employees are likely to perform better if their employment situations are compatible with their personal motivations. This P-O fit (or SENCO-school fit) has been defined as, "the congruence between the norms and values of the organisation and the values of persons" (p. 339). As such, the organisation is only one aspect of the model. The other part is the person or SENCO themselves with their own individual differences. Hadré and Sullivan (2008) suggest that at the level of the person, values and teacher motivation can be understood within a range of demographic differences including age and gender.

There are limited studies that look at the SENCOs themselves rather than the role they fulfil. For example, through an analysis of interviews with SENCOs, Mackenzie (2012) suggests that the gendered professional profile of the role can influence the way it is operationalised (90.6% of SENCOs in England are female – see Dobson, 2019). Another example comes from the cross-sectional thematic analysis by Dobson and Douglas (2018). They found that SENCOs reported a range of motivations for entering the role. However, the interpretative nature of these studies has made any statistical generalisation or comparison between groups impossible. The present study aims to build on these studies to develop a deeper understanding of the SENCO as a 'person' within this P-O fit. It is the first large-scale survey of SENCOs to explore this issue making it significant for all who work alongside SENCOs, plan their training and formulate related policy. The aim of this paper is to identify the factors that draw teachers towards this complex position. It also seeks to address whether these factors feature consistently across the SENCO population.

Career interest theory and application to SENCOs.

Research and theorising in relation to career interest has often had an individual or developmental focus. Many theories also provide associated measures of a person's suitability for a particular occupation but the use of these to measure interest in other roles is problematic. Based on the psychology of individual differences, Holland (1992, 1996) suggests that career interest can be understood within the context of the person-

environment fit. His theory involves six dimensions: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional (Holland, 1992, 1996). These dimensions are used to classify career interest and match people to appropriate professions. For example, 'artistic' people like to create original, imaginative work while 'social' people like to help others with their problems. Conversely, 'enterprising' people like to direct and persuade others while 'conventional' people are attracted to routines and meeting standards. However despite their potential utility, Liao, Armstrong and Rounds (2008) suggest that these dimensions still do not meet the needs of all career interests. For example, SENCOs may be teachers, school leaders or indeed both together (see Tissot, 2013). Holland's classification system describes teachers as 'artistic' and 'social'. In contrast, educational administrators (the US synonym for school leaders) are regarded as 'social' but also as 'enterprising' and 'conventional' (National Center for O*NET Development, 2019). This creates an obvious problem when considering a 'teacher leader' such as the SENCO. Additionally, the application of Holland's dimensions (such as O*NET) has been to assign an assessed individual to an appropriate occupation. This does not help us to understand the reasons why people choose a role.

Super (1980, p. 289) conceptualised a 'life career rainbow' arguing that career interest is developmental and that individuals adapt and change over time (Watts, 2001). Here he argues that people pass in a linear fashion through career stages and development tasks linked to nominal age ranges: growth (up to 14 years), exploration (15 to 24 years), establishment (25 to 44 years), maintenance (45 to 64 years) and disengagement (65 years +). Drawing upon a recent analysis of the SENCO population in England (Dobson, 2019), most SENCOs fall into the establishment stage (35.3%) or the maintenance stage (59.1%). Following Super's (1980) model, those in the 'establishment stage' can be described as gaining employment and becoming stable in a position followed by a period of consolidation with some seeking advancement into different or promoted roles. Those in the 'maintenance stage' (the majority of SENCOs) are described as having the need to preserve a place within the world of work, which may involve the need to innovate in order to hold on to a role and keep up with others. However, like the measures associated with Holland (1992, 1996), these stages do little to explain interest in a role; rather, they provide a greater understanding of the intersection of age and work.

A further approach to career interest is based on the concept of self-efficacy. Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994) were influenced by the earlier work of Bandura's

social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Looking beyond fixed traits and developmental stages, the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) posited that career interest was developed through three interacting variables: 'self-efficacy beliefs', 'outcome expectations' and 'personal goals'. Past accomplishments may lead to a belief of 'self-efficacy', while 'outcome expectations' relate to what will happen as a result of engaging in an activity. In turn, this may develop a 'personal goal'. Interested in what motivates teachers to train to be SENCOs, Dobson and Douglas (2018) conducted a qualitative study in which a group of 88 teachers undertaking mandatory SENCO training were asked to list their reasons for their interest in the role of the SENCO. Participants reported individually-focused reasons for wanting to become a SENCO in line with the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), e.g. recognition of being an inclusive teacher (self-efficacy); a desire to share practice with others (outcome expectations); and to become a SENCO (personal goal).

Nevertheless, Dobson and Douglas (2018) also conclude that the explanation offered by the SENCOs also refer to broader contextual factors. Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1976, 1996, 2005) they argue that individually focused motivations are accompanied and influenced by national culture and policy. This broader approach has also been acknowledged theoretically by Patton and McMahon (2014) who have developed a systems-based approach to understanding career development. This incorporates the personality and trait factors advocated by McCrae and Costa (2008) alongside an acknowledgment that these interact with other individually focused variables such as gender, values and work skills. However, these factors do not exist in isolation but are influenced by social and environmental factors. These include the groups to which individuals have belonged including family groups, workplace groups and other peer groups. These groups also interact with wider factors such as location, employment market and political decisions.

Building upon the Dobson and Douglas (2018) qualitative study, the current study aims to systematically explore the ecological drivers (social and individual) that motivate SENCOs to do their job. It builds on a more ecologically orientated approach by acknowledging the diverse reasons offered for career interest. Looking beyond much career interest theory that seeks to match people to occupations, the research seeks to understand how people come to develop an interest in a specific occupation – the SENCO. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

(1) What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?
(2) Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e. school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e. SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status and age).

Method

A self-report survey of current and in-training SENCOs was undertaken in which they offered views of what motivated them to be a SENCO. Views were gathered through a structured self-completion questionnaire.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was specifically designed for the present study and consists of four sections. The first section contains a 32-item inventory covering reasons why the individual became or wanted to become a SENCO. These items were paraphrased versions of the 32 SENCO career interest themes identified through the Dobson and Douglas (2018) qualitative study. For each item, participants were asked to "rate **how important** the following have been in **contributing towards you developing an interest** in being a **SENCO**" on a five point scale: extremely important (5); very important (4); moderately important (3); slightly important (2); and not important at all (1).

The second section requested demographic information using categories and identifiers from the Department for Education (DfE) national workforce database (DfE, 2018) which could be compared to a national dataset of SENCOs (Dobson, 2019). These indicators include age, gender, highest qualification held and ethnicity. The third section requested details about the respondent's current post including current job title, position of role within teachers' pay and conditions (DfE, 2017), whether the role was full time or part time, length of time as a teacher, whether the respondent is currently a SENCO (and for how long), and the amount of time allocated to the role of being a SENCO. The final section requested information about the respondent's establishment: type of school; children on the school roll; and the school's current Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) grade.

The questionnaire was distributed in two formats (though the content was the same): an online questionnaire using the online survey tool Qualtrics; a paper-based

questionnaire. Prior to distribution the questionnaire was piloted in two stages. The questionnaire was initially shared with two members of a university support service who commented on both the readability and layout of the written form of the instrument. Based on these recommendations, adaptations to the format of the written questionnaire were made prior to the instrument being piloted with a group of 25 teachers undertaking the NASENCo award who met the eligibility criteria outlined below. No changes were made after this second pilot.

Sample recruitment and procedure

Eligibility for the survey was restricted to teachers who are current SENCOs or aspirant SENCOs undertaking training by a recognised NASENCo provider.

The recruitment and distribution process were similar for both formats of the questionnaire (online and paper). The survey was distributed to teachers undertaking the NASENCo award at 25 higher education providers nationally. In addition, the survey was distributed to SENCOs at network events run within three local authorities and two private advisory services within the West Midlands area of England. In all cases the recruitment was two staged: recruitment of gatekeepers followed by distribution of questionnaires. All gatekeeper organisations were initially contacted by the first author. The research aims were discussed, and agreement was sought to distribute the questionnaire to eligible participants with whom they had contact. Each organisation was asked which format of questionnaire (online or paper) they required. These were sent as links (online copies) or distributed physically (as paper copies). Online submissions were automatically stored in an online database. Paper submissions were returned to the first author and were manually entered into this database.

Each questionnaire contained an introductory letter outlining the purpose of the survey, the voluntary nature of participation and the guarantee of anonymity. This resulted in 618 valid responses.

Types of establishment

The participants worked in schools which varied in size with up to 2200 pupils on roll (M = 474 pupils, SD = 372.5). The school types are presented in table 1. With a few exceptions, respondents mostly came from primary (ages 5-11) and secondary (ages 11-18) schools which Ofsted had judged to vary in quality.

[TABLE 1 here]

Demographic characteristics of respondents

Overall, 567 (91.7%) of respondents were female and 46 (7.4%) were male with 5 (0.8%) not answering. The sample broadly reflects the national SENCO gender split of 90.6% female and 9.4% male (Dobson, 2019). Most respondents identified as white British (89%) which is marginally below the 91.4% of SENCOs identifying as white British nationally (Dobson, 2019). The mean age of the sample was 40.8 years (*SD* = 8.98). Much of the sample (47.4%) qualified to teach through a post graduate route with 20.1% of respondents holding a full master's degree.

School roles

Respondents consisted mostly of SENCOs (n = 523) and teachers undergoing mandatory training (n = 87). They reported their length of service as a teacher to be between 1 and 44 years with a mean of 14.94 years (*SD* = 7.87). Within the sample, 523 (84.6%) were the nominated SENCO in school with a mean of 3.5 years (*SD* = 3.98) experience and a mean of 45.8% (*SD* = 31.24) of their time to undertake the SENCO role. Full time contracts were held by 453 (73.3%) respondents while 154 (24.9%) were part time with 11 (1.8%) respondents not reporting. This is not dissimilar to the national picture where 28.9% of SENCOs work part time (Dobson, 2019). Within the sample, 433 (70.1%) of the respondents were employed as a class teacher under teachers' pay and conditions (DfE, 2017). This figure includes those teachers with an additional payment such as Teaching and Learning Responsibilities. This is higher than the national figure of 61.8%. Leadership positions such as headteacher (1.6%), deputy headteacher (6.3%) and assistant headteacher (19.4%) were held by 27.3% of respondents with 16 (2.6%) not responding. Differences from these figures throughout the rest of the analysis result from exclusion due to missing data.

Analysis

The analysis has been driven by the research questions and followed a classic exploratory factor analysis (EFA) format. Firstly, the EFA was undertaken on the 32-item inventory concerned with reasons for becoming a SENCO. This identified the

factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming and being a SENCO (RQ1) and allowed us to create these factors as variables which could be taken to the second stage of the analysis.

Research question 2 (RQ2) is concerned with how these factors might interact with school-level and individual-level variables. This was explored through a series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Prior to each ANOVA selected demographic variables were recoded or regrouped to support the analyses. This gave the following variables:

- *qualifications (3)* – based upon DfE (2018) census collections, 'degree level qualifications' (n = 191), 'postgraduate teaching qualifications' (n = 293) and 'master's level and above' (n = 125); respondents who chose to 'prefer not to say' (n = 4) were removed from the analysis.
- *age group of learners (2)* – split between primary age (n = 420) and secondary age (n = 123); those respondents working in nursery schools (n = 7) were incorporated into primary data while respondents working in middle schools (n = 7), all-through schools (n = 23) and other (n = 34) were removed from the data for this analysis.
- *school quality (4)* – was measured using the Ofsted grading system (Ofsted, 2019). Through periodic inspection, schools are classified (sample data in brackets) as outstanding (n = 108), good (n = 370), requires improvement (n = 85) or inadequate (n = 13). Respondents who were unsure or suggested that this item was not applicable (n = 29) were removed from the analysis.
- *contract type (2)* – split between full time (n = 453) and part time (n = 154). No further adjustments were made.
- *gender (2)* – split between male (n = 46) and female (n = 567). No further adjustments were made.
- *SENCO/SENCO undergoing training (2)* – split between SENCO (n = 523) and SENCO undergoing training (n = 87). No further adjustments were made.
- *school leadership status (2)* – in line with the two sets of contract scales outlined in teachers' pay and conditions (DfE, 2017), school leader (n = 169) (including headteacher, deputy headteacher, and assistant headteacher) and class teacher (n = 433).
- *age band of participants (2)* – in line with Super (1980), establishment (25 to 44 years) (n = 408) and maintenance (45 to 64 years) (n = 197); the small number

of participants within the ‘exploration’ and so-called ‘decline’ stages were removed from the analysis.

Results

Table 2 sets out the mean, mode and standard deviations for all 32 SENCO interest questionnaire items.

[TABLE 2 here]

As can be seen in table 2, 25 items were negatively skewed between -2.729 and -0.089 and had modes between 3 and 5, suggesting that over the whole sample, these items positively influenced the career decisions of the respondents. Six items were positively skewed between 0.046 and 0.886 and had a mode of 1 suggesting that across the sample most respondents indicated that these items did not contribute towards them wanting to become a SENCO. While distribution of responses for each item deviated from normality, the results of normality tests were discounted due to the large sample presented within this study (see Field, 2018, p. 249).

Identifying underlying SENCO interest factors

In order to examine the structure of SENCO career interest, the items were subjected to an EFA. Prior to the analysis, several stringent criteria were applied to ensure that the data met the assumptions of a factor analysis model. Initial analyses of the *R*-matrix for all items indicated a violation of multicollinearity (Field, 2018, p. 799). The *R*-matrix was scanned for three criteria which may contribute to multicollinearity: i) correlations that were not high enough; ii) correlations that were too high; iii) items with too many correlations that did not exceed 0.3 (Field, 2018, p. 798; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2006, p. 131). This led to the removal of seven items (1, 2, 4, 6, 29, 31 and 32). The analysis was re-run with the remaining 25 items, resulting in five factors. A further three items were removed (8, 30 and 19) due to an unacceptable level of shared variance (Field, 2018, p. 806). This resulted in a stable four-factor structure. This model met all necessary assumptions with the determinant above the acceptable level of 0.00001 (Field, 2018, p.806). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure (KMO) was 0.92, verifying the sampling adequacy to be of the highest level, ‘marvellous’ (see Kaiser &

Rice, 1974, p.112). A further analysis of the KMO for each item was conducted. The lowest item was 0.796 (item 5) which placed all items well within the acceptable limit of above 0.5 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974).

Four factors with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser, 1960) were extracted which explained 49.32% of overall variance. The choice of the four-factor model was confirmed by examination of the scree plot. The average communalities for all items was 0.49 making the use of Kaiser's criterion of one problematic for factor extraction. However, due to the evidence derived from both the scree plot and Kaiser's criterion alongside the large sample size it was decided to retain all four factors (Field, 2018, pp. 811-812). Table 3 shows the factor loading after orthogonal (varimax) rotation. A final stage of EFA is naming the factors. Inspection of the items clustering on each factor led us to propose the following 'SENCO interest factors':

- factor 1: 'inclusion'
- factor 2: 'high quality provision'
- factor 3: 'educational and professional development'
- factor 4: 'leadership voice and status'

[TABLE 3 here]

Comparison between SENCO interest factors

In a similar fashion to Borg, Riding and Falzon (1991), the remaining 22 items were reduced to four variables by taking the mean of the items across the four factors. Any crossloaded factors were included with the factor with which they had the larger loading (see table 3). The initial analysis involved a one-way repeated measures ANOVA to establish if there were any significant differences across all four SENCO interest factors. As Mauchley's test of sphericity (Field, 2018, p. 669) was significant at $p < .001$, the Greenhouse- Geisser epsilon parameter was used to provide a more "conservative" (Field, 2018, p. 671) F test.

The results demonstrate that the main effect for SENCO interest was statistically significant, $F(2.06, 1209.99) = 294.30$, $p < .001$; suggesting that the four SENCO interest factors differed from one another across the group as a whole. On inspection of

the means, the factor representing the largest SENCO interest was ‘inclusion’ (M = 4.15, SD = .67) followed by ‘high quality provision’ (M = 3.87, SD = .69) and ‘educational and professional development’ (M = 3.54, SD = .85). The factor ‘leadership voice and status’ was the lowest interest factor across the sample although it had the highest variance (M = 3.01, SD = 1.22). As the difference between factors was statistically significant, further analysis of the factors was undertaken through three planned contrasts (see Field, 2018, p. 673). Two factors can be described as being outward facing and school focused (inclusion and high quality provision) because the interest in the role was centred around developing inclusive settings based on a rights agenda through good classroom practice. The other two factors can be described as being inward facing and person focused (professional and career development and leadership voice and status) because the factors were related to the development of the self, including education, experience and personal standing within the school. The first contrast between the outward facing and the inward facing factors was statistically significant $F(1, 588) = 439.78$, $p < .001$ indicating that overall teachers’ interest in being a SENCO is driven more by outward facing variables such as rights, inclusion and the desire to improve provision. There were also significant differences within these contrasts with SENCOs wishing to develop inclusion over high quality provision $F(1, 588) = 142.13$, $p < .001$ and educational and professional development over leadership status $F(1, 588) = 149.73$, $p < .001$.

Interactions with school and individual characteristics

To test whether there were any demographic variations within the SENCO interest factors, a series of two-way mixed design factorial ANOVAs were conducted with SENCO interest factors as repeated measures variables and demographic items as between-subjects variables. As Mauchley’s test of sphericity (Field, 2018, p. 669) was statistically significant at $p < .001$, the Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon parameter was again used to provide the F test (Field, 2018, p. 671). Carlson and Timm (1974, p. 569) warn of the problems of using a non-orthogonal data set; however, they acknowledge that this may be inevitable when looking at population frequencies. To counteract for this unbalanced design, the unweighted marginal means method (Maxwell, Delaney & Kelley, 2018, p. 361) was used to calculate the sums of squares for the different ANOVAs.

Two types of ANOVA were conducted:

(1) Across the demographic variables and the SENCO interest factors (within-subjects effects) to test for interactions between different demographics and individual SENCO interest factors.
(2) Between the different demographic variables (between-subject effects) to test for differences between the various groups across all factors.

[TABLE 4 here]

Table 4 lists all the effects between the SENCO interest factors and demographic variables. Firstly, there was a significant main effect of gender with women being more positive than men across all factors. There were also other significant interactions between the four interest factors: (1) whether the individual was a SENCO or SENCO Undergoing training (2) leadership status, and (3) age. These are described in turn.

SENCO/SENCO undergoing training x SENCO interest factors:

Here a SENCO undergoing training is defined as those who are not yet a named SENCO but are undertaking the NASENCo award. Those who are SENCOs undergoing training score significantly higher across all SENCO interest factors compared with actual SENCOs (Figure 1). However, the significant interaction shows that the SENCOs undergoing training are particularly more positive in relation to the factor 'professional and career development'. This suggests that their interest in the role may be because it is seen as an important step in being able to further develop their practice through a greater understanding of more inclusive teaching and gaining further qualifications.

Figure 1: The relationship between SENCO/SENCO undergoing training and SENCO interest factors.

[Figure 1 here]

Leadership status x SENCO interest factors

Those on the leadership scale are more positive in relation to the 'leadership voice and status' factor compared to those not on the leadership scale, i.e. class teacher scale (Figure 2). The reverse appears to be the case for the other three factors. This suggests that respondents on the class teacher scale are significantly less interested in leadership status than their counterparts on the school leadership scale but still value the potential for career development and further study.

Figure 2: The relationship between leadership status and SENCO interest factors.

[Figure 2 here]

Age x SENCO interest factors

There was no significant main effect of participant's age band. However, while there are no apparent effects of age on the outward looking factors of 'inclusion' and 'high quality provision', the significant interaction of age seems to be linked to factor 3, 'educational and professional development' (Figure 3). This suggests that those in the 'establishment' stage (aged 25 to 44 years) were motivated more by a need to continue developing their knowledge and skill set to establish and further their careers.

Figure 3: The relationship between age and SENCO interest factors.

[Figure 3 here]

Discussion

Although it must be acknowledged that as a self-report survey the responses may be prone to social desirability bias, the current investigation adds further understanding of why teachers both enter and sustain their interest in the role of SENCO. The factor analysis of the 32 items derived from Dobson and Douglas (2018) reveals an underlying structure of four factors. The study points to significant differences between these factors and a hierarchy of interest for those wishing to enter the role of SENCO or

special educator. The factors are described in greater detail below drawing upon the ecological or systems approach (see Bronfenbrenner 1996, 2005) and career development literature (see Dobson & Douglas, 2018; Patton & McMahon, 2014). Each factor description is constructed from the individual questionnaire items from which they are derived (and cross-references to these are made).

Why do people choose to become SENCOs?

(1) 'Inclusion' (Factor 1) – The first factor suggests that SENCOs have an interest in promoting equity in society (influenced by policy and international accords). Several statutory mechanisms exist to ensure inclusion (item 23) and SENCOs are interested in these being followed. This will enable them to increase participation of all children in school activities (item 17) and develop greater equity (item 28). The SENCO is interested in working with other professionals who support a given child (item 24). Educational decisions should not be made by professionals alone; rather, SENCOs indicate a concern in decision making being participatory with children and parents in full control. The SENCO expresses a keen interest in working alongside parents and children to facilitate these decision-making processes (items 7, 26 and 27). The SENCO shows concern for enabling the child to reach their full potential in life (item 25).

The factor entitled 'inclusion' consists of items that are more distal to the person and embedded within macro national and international policy such as 'to empower parents to make decisions about their children' (see DfE/DOH 2015 section 1) or placing 'a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life' (see UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 1989). This factor can be further classified as being 'outward facing' which is defined in this context as the teacher who wishes to use their skills, attributes and training for the benefit of both society and individuals. Across all participants, this was the highest scoring factor suggesting that people are attracted to the role of the SENCO primarily for these altruistic and ideological reasons.

(2) 'High quality provision' (Factor 2) – The second factor suggests that SENCOs have a clear vision of what they would like provision to be in their setting (item 18). SENCOs have a desire to develop provision at the whole school level (item

9) and develop the skills of teachers to be more inclusive at the classroom level (item 11). Experience appears to be a key component of this dimension. These experiences are proximal such as working alongside individual children (item 3) or more distal such as wanting to change practice within individual classrooms and schools (item 9). The factor suggests that the desire to change practice may also relate to direct observation of teachers not meeting the needs of children (item 16). Additionally, for some, the desire to change provision would appear to be related to working in settings where improvement was needed to support children with SEN (items 15 and 22).

In a finding similar to Dobson and Douglas (2018), SENCOs report a wish to mediate the change of school provision for the benefit of children with SEN. There is a clear link with the first factor of 'Inclusion' albeit with a more proximal focus on school practice. Akin to working in Bronfenbrenner's exosystem (see Dobson & Douglas, 2018), SENCOs wish to facilitate change at a whole-school level to indirectly affect change for children by working alongside their teachers. This factor is also 'outward facing' as the SENCO is describing an attraction of the role is to develop outcomes for others. As the second highest scoring factor, it suggests that alongside a belief in inclusion, SENCOs wish to develop practice through working developmentally within individual school systems.

(3) 'Educational and professional development' (Factor 3) – The third factor suggests that many SENCOs are attracted to the role as a vehicle for developing their knowledge and skills (item 10) and enhancing their voice and status within school settings (item 13). SENCOs are interested in formal learning opportunities such as further study (item 12) and opportunities to develop inclusive practice (item 14). Some also wish to enhance their career prospects (item 5).

The third factor is more personal to the SENCO and is related to the proximal activities advocated in Bronfenbrenner's microsystem. Again, this factor aligns with the findings of Dobson and Douglas (2018) who suggest that the SENCO is partly attracted to the position for the purpose of personal development. This factor has been further categorised as inward facing, and as such is dichotomous to the previous outward facing factors. Here there is the aim to develop personal benefits such as skills, qualifications

and career progression. Although these new skills may benefit individual schools, they ultimately reside within the individual and are portable between settings.

(4) 'Leadership voice and status' (Factor 4) – The fourth factor suggests that many SENCOs want to be heard at senior leadership level within their school (item 20). They have a desire to be appointed to a position of school leader (item 21).

The last factor relates to leadership. Again, this motivation may be interpreted as proximal to the person and a sign of ambition. Thus, it is further classified as an inward facing factor. The factor structure itself does not provide any explanation as to why this is the lowest scoring dimension. However, this score may be understood within the context of policies where leaders are regarded as key instruments within the self-improving school system (DfE, 2010; 2016). Ball (2013) notes the changing perceptions of 'leadership' and acknowledges that within policy the individual leader is regarded as a "dynamic visionary" (p. 163) and the process of leadership is regarded as a "generic mechanism for change" (p. 164). This 'vision' is evident in the first factor and the 'mechanisms' are evident in the second and third factors. Ball (2013) argues that the "self-managing school must surveil and regulate itself" (p. 164) and that "the leader becomes… the manager of institutional performance" (p. 164). Within this context, SENCO participants wish to operate as an internal mechanism of support for both children and teachers; however, what may be rejected (or at least is not evident within these factors) is a desire to be part of the associated regulatory and performance orientated culture. Curran (2019) adds to this argument. She suggests that some SENCOs want to lead but some have no desire to be formally recognised as school leaders. Based on evidence from interviews collected over the period of a year, she questions whether SENCOs feel the need to become school leaders. She suggests that SENCOs often do not want to become formal school leaders and they do not regard this as a barrier to implementing change in provision. Instead, they use their deep understanding of SEN policy frameworks to act as "covert entrepreneurs" (p. 85) for driving change in provision and inclusion in their settings. Whether SENCOs wish to avoid the regulatory structures and accountability associated with leadership or they see other mechanisms for driving change is worthy of further research.

The relationships between factors and groups

The factors above are presented in order of level of interest. There is a significant difference between factors across all participants with the outward facing factors being reported to be more influential than the inward facing factors. There were significant differences between the different participant groups of gender, SENCO/SENCO undergoing training, school leadership status and age band of participants. These are discussed in turn. Women responded more positively than men across all factors. There could be several reasons for this difference and may include methodological issues such as sample size or response bias. However, in line with the work of Mackenzie (2012, p. 1074) and Pulsford (2019), the observed difference does provide further evidence that gender may be associated with why people enter the role in the first instance. In particular, Mackenzie draws our attention to the gendered, almost maternally orientated, discussions of her participants whose experiences as parents underpinned their practice. Additional work is now needed in this area.

Likewise, those who are training to be a SENCO reported their interest more positively across all factors than those who are already in the role. This finding may reflect that positivity expressed while in training may decline once the post becomes a reality, and in that sense is a cause for concern. This could be symptomatic of wider contextual factors such as the perceived enormity of the role and lack of time, resources and status for those already in it. Consequently, this would appear to lead to both dissatisfaction and high levels of attrition (Curran, Maloney, Heavy & Boddinson, 2018). A positive analysis might be that engagement in training has additional positive consequences which may be lost once training is complete, such as peer support from other SENCOs in training. Consideration of approaches to support potentially isolated SENCOs post training might also be the focus of further work.

Interactions within the SENCO interest factors occurred across three groups of participants. In all three cases, the interactions happened within the inward facing factors (factors three and four). Again, taking the SENCO/SENCO undergoing training variable, those undergoing training unsurprisingly reported a much higher interest in the development opportunities they perceived the role to bring. Likewise, taking school leadership status, those who were school leaders were significantly more interested in leadership than their counterparts on the class teacher scale. Once again, this could be symptomatic of individual personality differences between those attracted to teaching

who may be ‘artistic’ and ‘social’ and those attracted to school leadership who may be ‘social’, ‘enterprising’ and ‘conventional’ (National Center for O*NET Development, 2019). In addition, SENCOs may wish to avoid elements of the leadership role or indeed not see the need to be a leader to improve the outcomes discussed earlier.

Finally, considering the interaction with age, in line with the work of Super (1980), the older respondents (classified by Super as in the ‘maintenance stage’ of their career) were much less interested in ‘educational and professional development’ than younger participants (classified by Super as in the ‘exploration’ of their career). Why this occurs is not clear; however, Super (1980) offers a suggestion that those in the ‘exploration’ stage may be seeking new information to place themselves in a new job or role while those in the ‘maintenance’ stage may be concerned with “holding one’s own” (p. 292). If this is applied to the SENCO population, then 41.3% (see Dobson, 2019) are in the ‘holding one’s own’ stage. If Super’s argument of the “temporal importance” (p. 288) of different stages of life is applied to the SENCO population, those who are ‘holding one’s own’ are of concern and worthy of further research.

Conclusion

The present study has provided a model of four clearly defined independent factors to help understand why teachers undertake the complex role of the SENCO. Put simply, SENCOs are motivated by a desire to: improve inclusion by working within school systems; develop high quality provision for all children across their school, especially those with SEN; learn new skills and develop professionally; and be a school leader. All SENCOs express interest in these dimensions but some factors are more important with some groups of individuals than with others. Being able to define and understand these factors has utility for policy makers, training providers, schools and individuals alike. All can use the factors as a framework to balance the emphasis and focus of the SENCO role – whether in a given setting or across the sector as a whole. This might be ensuring a good SENCO-school fit (crucial for the school employer and SENCO employee alike), ensuring training programmes can accommodate and value the different motivations of trainees (including challenging trainees to recognise these differences), and ensuring policy makers are alert to what motivates the workforce should they seek to introduce policies that may not sit comfortably with existing practice. This latter

point is particularly important in a climate of teacher attrition and poor teacher recruitment (Foster, 2019), difficulties recruiting SENCOs (NAHT, 2016) and evidence suggesting that a third of SENCOs do not see themselves in the role in the next five years (Curran et al., 2018). If each of these 18,500 SENCOs in England (Dobson, 2019) cost a nominal £2,500 each to train through the statutory NASENCo course (based on 2020 fees at an unnamed training provider), this equates to £46.25 million of public investment. Such an investment is wasted if we cannot utilise their motivations to retain them in their current role. Likewise, if a third of SENCOs intend to leave this role within a five year period, an additional £15.5 million from stretched school budgets will be needed to train new SENCOs.

While the SENCO role explored in this paper is specific to England, similar roles often exist in other countries and it seems reasonable to assume that educators of all kinds will be motivated by a range of inward and outward facing factors. This makes the present study a significant contribution to the fields of both the career development of teachers and educational leadership. By surfacing the motivations of SENCOs through discreet factors, these factors can now be fully harnessed and utilised in the pursuit of inclusion and high-quality education, the recruitment of a skilled and committed workforce and the retention of teachers within this field.

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